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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THROUGH THE EYES OF SIX-YEAR OLDS

University — Université

ALBERTA

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

M. Ed.

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade	Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse
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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THROUGH THE EYES OF SIX-YEAR OLDS

by

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A THESIS

SUMBITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1983

NICRO

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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submitted by Neil Robert Winther in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Supervisor

.....

.....

Date Oct. 11/83

DEDICATED

To

My Wife Wendy

and Daughter Andrea

ABSTRACT

The present research attempts to describe the meaning of physical activity as experienced by a class of grade one students. In contrast to many studies which view physical activity as a series of events which can be tested and measured, this study perceives physical activity as a way of being in the world for the children who were observed. The study is then context bound, a study of situation rather than variables and an attempt to see the world as children see it.

A situational study was carried out with a grade one class as they went about their daily routines at school. This involved observations, small group discussions, art work by the students, shared experiences in the gymnasium and on the playground, interviews and story telling. Data was collected in the form of detailed field notes, a daily diary and tape recorded conversations which were later transcribed. Fifteen students were interviewed and observed during the study which took place over an eight month period.

The analysis of the material gathered in this study revealed a variety of themes relating to children's views of physical activity. The views speak of a child created world that exists within an adult imposed world. The importance of physical activity in the lvies of children is considered and the suggestion is made that schools become more "child-friendly".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express by deepest gratitude to all who have helped in the realization of this thesis. Special thanks are due to:

Dr. Larry Beauchamp, my advisor, for his constant encouragement, enthusiasm and availability;

Dr. Jim Parsons and Dr. David Sande, members of my committee for their interest and invaluable comments;

Dr. Val Suransky and Dr. Ton Beekman, who were a source of inspiration and direction;

Dr. Max van Manen, who helped me look at childhood in a new light;

Dr. Ted Aoki and Dr. Ken Jacknicke for their ongoing assistance and sensitivity to my needs;

Prof. Kally Kennedy for sharing her wealth of knowledge of physical activity and the young child;

Teacher Susan and her grade one class for welcoming me into their school;

My parents, sisters and other family for their many years of encouragement;

My wife, Wendy for patience and support;

Our daughter, Andrea, who serves as an inspiration as she discovers childhood;

And finally, my typist, Heather Lenz, for her wonderful job.

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LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS
A CHILD MAKES

Listen to the sounds a child makes,
The spoken pleas, the silent message,
It is the child we teach,
Not the content, the morals, the skills.

Listen for the child who needs to be seen.
He needs to be known as unique,
Not just another one of the group.
The message may come
As a flurry of temper,
A shouted word,
A carefully spoken question,
Or a soft intent look.

Listen to our own needs,
The problems of the teacher,
The principal, the counselor.
How are these needs met?
Whose desires determine the course of the day?
All are there and should be heard,
Never forgotten or put aside.
We are all there and all must be a part.

Listen to the world outside,
Beyond the walls of the room.
Move as a part of life;
Share the warmth and reality of today.

by Patricia R. Burgette

CHAPTER I

THE QUESTION

An Invitation to the Reader

As you read this interpretation of childhood experiences I encourage you to reflect upon your own history. Your recollections of what it was like to engage in physical activity as a child will bring you closer to understanding the topic. Take a moment to recall the spaces, times, friends and activities that were a part of your landscape as a child. What do you vividly recall after all these years? As Apple (1982) states:

> Decent practice is based upon decent reflection. (p.2)

The reflection Apple speaks of must have a starting focus and the most meaningful one is our own lived experiences. We are all experts in this respect. Use this study as a stimulus to relive your past and use your past as a means of shedding new light on the present findings.

Consider this study a journey through a small part of childhood. I hope you will see familiar images and leave the text saying, "Yes, that's the way it was for me."

Introduction to the Question

The world of children is one filled with movement. Adults are often satisfied to be sedentary while children are inclined to be active. Children's surroundings beckon to them and body movement allows them to respond to this

irresistable invitation to explore. Their world is a meaningful world, often an imaginary world full of challenge. For a child, climbing a tree to avoid being captured by pirates or leaping across shark infested streams not to mention crouching breathlessly in one's secret fort in hide and seek may all be part of an ordinary day. The child has no difficulty making life fun. Lee (6 yrs.), for example, had a definite opinion on the communal rewards of running:

Neil: Is it more fun to run by yourself or with someone else?

Lee: With one other person. If there's too many people you get squashed. If there's too little people - you get lonely. I like two people best because then we can tell secrets.

In most schools, specified blocks of time are set aside to "physically educate" students. This instruction may be offered by the classroom teacher or in other cases a physical education specialist. In addition to the "gym time", children have the opportunity to play with their friends at recess, noon hour and before and after school. Many children take part in physical activities arranged through community clubs and other organizations. Children learn from the experiences they share with the people all around them -- their parents, teachers, brothers, sisters and peers.

Teachers envision their role as one of offering children the opportunity to work freely in physical education within the limits of their own unique endowment (Department of Education - London, 1974). It is their responsibility to provide stimulating opportunities for children which will help to encourage confidence and self-assurance. Unfortunately, few of us appreciate the importance of the ordinary world of the school, of the home, and of the playground (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker and Mulderij, 1979). The everyday lived experiences of young children are often poorly understood by adults. If we are endeavouring to enhance the learning experiences of young children we must first find out what these experiences mean to the children. van Manen (Dec. 1982) spoke of this concern:

> Try to get the universal dimensions of the physical experience and human movements, the child's movements, the experience with body - then you are really using these children as an occasion to ask the question. (p.1)

Need for the Study

Over the years I have become increasingly uneasy with my efforts to design meaningful movement experiences for children. I concluded that before proceeding any further I must first undertake the task of describing the ordinary lived world of the child. Following the direction of Husserl's proverbial saying "to the things themselves," it seemed appropriate that a study of this nature concern

itself with the everyday world of the child. The study is then context bound, a study of situation rather than variables.

There is a need for a study that regards the knowledge children have of their own world as "high status knowledge." In the words of Beekman (1982) we must make schools "child-friendly" places for children. The first step is to relinquish the "expert licence" we were issued along with our teaching certificates and start listening to what children have to say:

> When you jog to school, you get your mind on all different stuff than if you were jogging home. When you jog home, on your mind you got stuff like what you're gonna do when you get home. You know what you're gonna do when you get to school because - it's like - umm - you do the same things - in the same order. There's no surprise, but you're not really sure [about this] when you jog home.

This was Sue's recollection of what she thought about while jogging. Her memories became part of the raw material used to do this study.

Background Information

In the last decade there has been a movement by parents to get their children involved in organized physical activity as soon as they could walk (see Appendix 1). This concern may stem partly from the extensive coverage the media has given to fitness and healthy lifestyles. However, the prestige in saying "Sarah shows exceptional promise in

ballet" or "Edward beat everyone else in swimming last week" may also attract some parents.

The marketing of these "enriched movement experiences" for children was soon identified by groups of entrepreneurs (see Appendix 2). Children's athletic programs are big business. The product is not difficult to sell because many parents feel their children are not receiving enough high quality instruction at school. An extreme example of early exposure to athletic training can be seen in the Soviet Union (see Appendix 3). Genetic tests which scientists are using to identify athletic ability before the age of one are being conducted on infants. It is hard to imagine being cut from the Olympic team at ten months.

The point is that children have never had much say in what happened to them. They did not make the decision to take swimming lessons at six months or to go water skiing on their first birthday. The knowledge children have of their own lived world has never relly been taken seriously in designing these wonderful "enriched" programs. Physical educators and parents have relied largely on their own perceptions of the child's world in designing what they assumed were meaningful experiences. When adults assess programs, it is often a case of "if it was good enough for me - it is good enough for these kids."

As difficult and frustrating a task as it might be, it's time we tried to describe what physical activity <u>is</u> for the children as they live in it.

Implications

When we reflect on events that occurred in our childhood, some experiences come to mind immediately. We may even be able to identify certain "turning points" in the acceptance or rejection of occurrances that have influenced our attitudes and lifestyles today. If physical activity was fun for us then, it will likely be fun for us now. New insights can emerge from the recollections of our own past. Jimmy recounted a bit of his childhood history while talking with his friend Cameron:

> Oh...I can remember...remember when both our families went canoeing? Remember that? We were little babies and we were playing in the canoe...putting our hands in the water...pretending our hands were motor boats?

The detail with which Jimmy was able to describe this event gives us an indication of how significant the activity, setting, and friendship, were in his life.

Suranksy (1982) felt that we make our own history as adults and that children too are history-makers. She drew our attention to this issue in the following statement:

> Understanding the child from the perspective of his world is to hold the view that, despite biographical and developmental determinants, the growing child <u>is</u> an intentional actor constructing a life project with consciousness, that becoming in the world involves a dynamic self-representation, that the child too, is a historical being, a maker of history, a meaning-maker involved in a praxis upon the world. (p. 36)

In light of these considerations it is hoped that the outcomes of this study will be as follows:

1. It may provide valuable information about the lived experiences of children that could be used for the development of meaningful physical education curriculum (e.g., child friendly).
2. Its descriptions of childhood experiences may remind adults of another perspective of childhood - one that was long forgotten.
3. It may provide useful information on communicating with young children in an effort to describe their world.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My review of literature has not revealed any studies that look at the child's view of physical activity as experienced by that child. I did, however, discover a substantial number of studies which investigated the physical activity of the young child in more general terms. This information provides another useful data source and will therefore be elaborated on.

Adult and Peer Organized Activities

Podilchak (1981) studied a group of youth soccer players to determine the effects of institutionalization on play patterns. Data were collected by means of field observations and informal interviews. The study focused on the gap between formalized and spontaneous play and found that the boys preferred the adult-organized setting over games that they organized by themselves because the adult-organized games were more fair and less rough.

Helmes (1980) advocated the development of a teaching method that reverted to the natural behavior patterns and methods practiced by children in their daily activities. Harrocks (1980) argued that sportsmanship, discussions, reciprocal teaching, and game creation by the children are the most worthwhile outcomes of physical education programs. He suggested that activities that supported a framework of cooperative and empathetic behaviour encouraged children to share ideas and communicate better with their

peers.

Kirchner (1980) classified the differences between adult-organized sports for children and child-selected games. He argued that competititive sports for young children should be designed for them and not for adults, and that in order for this to take place, the activities must compliment the characteristics and needs of young children with a minimum of adult interference. He presented a Bill of Rights for young athletes as a guideline to be considered in the design of children's competitive sports programs.

Kleiber and Barnett (1980) suggested that adults should use non-obtrusive ways of enhancing children's leisure experiences. They argued that one must recognize the potentially suppressing and constraining effects of adults' control on children's play but at the same time be aware that adults can significantly influence the initiation and direction of play. Once again, the importance of physical activity in personality, social, and cognitive development was stressed and the advantages and disadvantages of structured leisure experiences were put forth.

Neulinger (1979) took the notion of leisure one step further. He believed leisure was a state of mind that all desired but few achieved. He made an important distinction between creative free time and creative leisure. Creativity was viewed as having an end product whereas leisure was a more relevant phenomenon for mental health. Neulinger suggested that leisure time for children must include the

conditions of freedom and intrinsic motivation in order to be effective. Walsh (1980) brought forth similar concerns about the adult tendency to over programme children's free time. This overprogramming was often caused by overinvolvement in sports related activities.

In conclusion, the majority of researchers felt that children should have more control over their landscape. Adult imposition often resulted in undesirable stress and the creation of an environment that was unhealthy for children.

Parents' Aspirations

> The new ABC's of babyhood are Anxiety, Betterment and Competition. Today's newborns are often blessed or cursed with a singular set of parents - older, richer, more combative, and firmly convinced there are lessons for everything. They're so anxious their kids not be left behind, there's almost a hysteria connected with it. Cathy, Rigby, 30, an Olympic gymnast at 15, knows pushing "can hurt, can destroy" - but still she's flashing reading cards at her three-month-old daughter, Theresa Anne, "just to open doors". (Langway, Jackson, Zaborsky, Shirley, Whitmore, 1983, p. 62).

One is forced to admit that the age of the "super-kid" has arrived. This modern era of childhood has brought with it increased demands on parents and children. Parents are achieving more and expect more from their children.

Suransky spoke of another important issure that has had some impact on today's children. She states that the oppression that radical feminists have traditionally

associated with motherhood has now been passed on to the children. Children have thus become the new oppressed minority. The most extreme vision of the "demise of childhood" was put forth by Firestone (Suransky, 1982) where she devised a plan for the "ultimate revolution" which called for the doing away with childhood as a life phase. Feeling that children differed from adults only in economic dependency, Firestone advocated the following tactics:

> The strategy for the liberation and full humanization of women and presumably others of humankind resides in the "cybernetic socialism," where the state of pregnancy is eliminated, mother-child attachment becomes taboo, parenthood is suspended by a community of adults whom the child will choose to relate to, genetic children are eventually phased out of existence, and the new household contains a regulated proportion (one-third) of children. (p. 10)

Germaine Greer's solution was not quite so radical - the founding of a baby farm in Italy where peasant families would take care of children. Parents would be allowed to jet in for the occasional visit. (Suransky, 1982, p. 11)

Thus the whole parenting issue was a huge one to tackle and a great deal of literature dealt with changing conceptions of childhood. Children were looked at either as brainy little beings who might never again be quite so curious and receptive or as inconveniences that should be "dealt with" in an efficient manner. Glen Domain, the self proclaimed "guru" of baby building and founder of the Better Baby Institute, claimed that tiny children believe "it is

their job to grow up." He felt it was adults who wanted to keep their children children. (Newsweek, Mar. 28, 1983).

Oliver (1980) found modest support for the hypothesis that the family was the most important socialization agent for young children to the cultural values of society. His study focused on the transmission of values concerning sports. Bulage (1981) analyzed fathers' aspirations for their sons in hockey and also the variation of these aspirations by social class. Bulage's study showed that fathers with higher educational and occupational levels had greater expectations of their sons. For example, fathers felt that their sons' skating ability would help them to be admitted to college on scholarship.

Kleiber, Barnett and Wade (1978) examined the sources of development of playfulness in children. Such variables as family size, birth order, child rearing practices, and child rearing attitudes were investigated to determine what influence they might have on the development of playfulness. The children in this study who came from larger families appeared to be more playful, probably because more opportunities for play presented themselves. Playfulness did not appear to be influenced by birth order or permissiveness and children who were involved in skill training programs showed a decline in playfulness.

One assumption that all highly structured activities implicitly contain is that children need supervision in planning efficient or worthwhile physical activities. But,

should a child's motor development be left to struggle when it could be enchanced through "proper" physical education activities? Mendelsohn (1979) felt that the biggest problem with children's sport and physical activity was parental interference resulting in overstructuring and overdemanding activity.

Certainly most parents do not want their children to be injured and thus discourage what they consider to be dangerous exploration through physical activity. This lack of reinforcement and encouragement would undoubtedly affect children's attitudes towards participation in such endeavours.

As the Literature has shown, many researchers feel that children's early motor development should be left alone to develop naturally. Unfortunately, this was seldom allowed to happen and more often children met with a great deal of inhibitive stimuli and negative reinforcements. Under such circumstances many newly discovered skills could not be practiced due to social inacceptability, lack of space, or safety precautions.

In conclusion, parents forget the negative implications of making learning stressful for their children. Coaching can make children better "performers" but they can achieve no more than their minds and bodies will permit.

Gender Differences in Play and Sport

The literature dealing with gender differences in physical activity suggested that the majority of these

differences centered on the socialization process. Greendorfer (1980) believed that variations in play and sport could be viewed as aspects of the enculturation process and that differences between the sexes should not be viewed as cultural products but rather as evidence that a socialization into the cultural gender role was taking place. She felt that more attention should be given to the child rearing practices and early social learning experiences that influence socialization into sport.

Watson (1980) examined sex differences in children's games and their implications for adulthood. Watson suggested that both the expectations of different sexes and the cultural "blueprint" of the games themselves contributed to the different experiences of boys and girls; but the issue was a matter of degree. He argued that the differences between the game experience of the two sexes could be attributed to the competencies children felt were available through game involvement. Watson went further to suggest that, in order to develop through sport, girls must be given extra support and encouragement in their initial development of competencies.

Klein and Bates (1980) studied the relationship between gender choices and both movement patterns and social behavior in first and second grade boys. According to the assessment of play preferences, the low masucline boys (boys were rated high, average, and low) were found to be the least dominant and aggressive, and the least socially

successful of the boys. Bird (1979) described the characteristics of eight to eleven year old girls who played body contact ice hockey. She found that the girls differed significantly from their normative population and from boy hockey players because they were more tough-minded and enthusiastic. The suggestion is made that girls with certain personality profiles may have elected to participate and stay in sports. An examination of partner preferences in cooperative and competitive sport situations reveals that, although males were found to prefer males, females did not generally differentiate on the basis of sex. (Duquin, 1980)

A study be Gronbech (1981) and further studies by Schutz, Smoll, and Wood (1981) investigated sexual stereotypes associated with sports participation. Females were found to be more interested in the social and aesthetic aspects of sport participation whereas their male counterparts were more interested in the ascetic and competitive apsects.

Lewko and Ewing (1980) examined the differential influences of various family members on boys and girls to become involved in sport. Results showed that fathers were the major socializing factor for highly involved males whereas all family members encouraged highly involved females.

Thus, the literature concluded that children were socialized at a very early age to perform in certain ways.

The process was a very powerful, all-encompassing force and parents might have had little control over it. The gender typing issue brings to mind the story of a father who bought his son a doll in an effort to broaden his youngster's perspectives. The boy promptly picked it up and flew it around the room, airplane style, complete with sound effects!

Success and Failure in Physical Activity

A famous football coach once said, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." This, of course, was an extreme stance on the winner/loser issue; however, it still reflects the attitude of a great number of coaches and parents. Unfortunately, many adults who design and implement children's programs do not think any further than that "sweet taste of victory."

One factor that many adults have forgotten in the "pursuit of excellence" is that all children do not possess the same athletic potential. Albinson (1979) contended that early athletic success was due to early maturation. Thus differing maturation rates cause inequalities amongst competitors in children's sports. As a consequence, early maturers are provided with a sense of achievement whereas other children suffer. Steigelman (1981) reinforced this claim with the results of a study examining the relationship between motor performance and social status in children three to six years of age. Analysis found that popularity was significantly correlated with speed and strength for

four year olds and with coordination for five year olds. She found no significant effect of either high or low motor skill on the popularity of three and four year old children. Children who were five and six years old with high motor skill ratings were significantly more popular than their lowest skilled peers, especially among the boys.

Adults are often encouraged to push their children to excel at a very young age. Van Oteghen and Jacobson (1981) encouraged this early involvement for the following reasons:

> Learning/perceiving beginning in infancy, depends upon movement experiences. Since 50% of a child's potential for learning is developed by age five, it is essential that quality movement programs be devised for young children of preschool age. (p.26)

Roberts, Kleiber and Duda (1981) investigated the relationship between sport participation and perceived competence. Subjects were asked to give their perceptions of competence relative to their teammates' perceptions. In addition, they were asked about general attributions about sport outcomes and their persistence and expectations of future success. The results suggested that participants in organized sports were higher in perceived competence, were more persistent and had higher expectations of future success.

Bukowski and Moore (1980) had boys who were participating in a series of athletic events evaluate the importance of possible causes for success and failure. The

boys cited ability, effort, luck, and task difficulty as reasons for success and failure. Success was attributed to internal factors whereas failure was attributed to external factors. Daughdrill's study (1978) revealed that older females attributed winning to external factors and losing to interal factors. Consistently losing situations had a more detrimental effect on older females than older males with respect to future expectations.

A study by Vaz (1982) uncovered some rather distressing findings. The researcher focused on how rule infractions and certain forms of violent behavior are institutionalized among young hockey players. Vaz contended that young players received no formal instruction on obeying rules although they do receive informal instruction on the use of illegitimate tactics. The violation of rules is therefore the outcome of the structure of the system and certain rule infractions are built into the system.

One could safely conclude that winning was a positive experience for most parents, coaches, and children. The winners are often children with above average potential and are encouraged by the status that success gives them. Very little research focused on the motor learning abilities of children although there are an abundance of tests available. Wade (1980) spoke on this issue:

> A conservative estimate places the number of motor ability tests for children currently at 256. It is probably true to say that for the majority of them there is no real rationale for their construction. (p. 1)

Very objective means have been developed for coaches and teachers to test children to determine which individuals are most skilled. From that point on the child becomes the product of adult design.

The inevitable result of being a loser was that the children dropped out of sports. Pooley (1981) did a study of young drop outs from soccer. The finding indicated that adult values were imposed on the children's sport, coaches were inadequately prepared and parents were concerned that their boys did not play enough games. The boys, on the other hand, felt that they would rather play for fun and be with their friends. They felt too much emphasis was placed on the competitive element.

Motivation and Rewards

No real concensus could be found in the literature on this issue. For example, Stratton and Pierce (1980) argued that much of the concern about the use of extrinsic rewards may be unfounded and that the undermining effect may not occur in the field setting to the extent that it does in the lab setting. This supported the theory that it is very difficult to replicate "lived" experiences in a laboratory. Barnett (1980), on the other hand, concluded that although individuals may regard their motivation to engage in a freely chosen activity as internally based, this motivation can be altered if external rewards are made contingent upon performance in the activity.

Orlick (1979) felt that the real rewards of physical activity would only be realized through cooperative play socialization among young children. Several studies were conducted to determine whether spontaneous cooperative interaction could be influenced by exposing preschoolers to a series of cooperatively structured play experiences. The results showed that the cooperative groups underwent a significant increase in cooperative behavior. A further study was conducted to assess the benefits of a cooperatively structured games program on sharing behavior and games playing happiness among five-year old children. Results showed the group exposed to a cooperative games program illustrated significantly more sharing behavior than a group exposed to a traditional games program.

In a final note on this topic, Orlick (1980) suggested that children socialized into an increasingly technical and competitive world by the major institutions of today are in danger of losing their humanity. He felt that if parents, teachers, and community leaders made a special effort to present cooperatively oriented play and values for both boys and girls, children would have a greater chance of maintaining their humanity.

The Politics of Play

Several researchers have investigated the political character of play and children's sports. Gruneau (1982) argued that contemporary analyses do not grasp the way in which sport was connected to major forms of power and

discrimination. Cantelon (1980) drew attention to the fact that the ages of international calibre athletes have decreased, while the intensity of training has increased. He noted that the attitudes and responses of both children and athletes, heavily committed to high performance sports, have been historically specific and parallel similar attitudes and responses regarding child labour of the previous decades. Sutton-Smith (1981) also pointed to a control of children in the years 1890-1950 by means of playgrounds, organized sport, and physical education classes.

CHAPTER III

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The Search for the Method/Approach

The review of literature was helpful in that it revealed six distinct research methodologies which were employed to study young children. Questionnaires and surveys were used to collect objective information which was often of a demographic nature. A large variety of tests, scales and schedules which focused on anxiety, motoric motivation, motor proficiency and perceived competetence were available. Other historical accounts gave information on the changing images of children's sports. Several researchers collected data through direct observation; others conducted interviews. A great number of studies used a "method" I identified as "expert licence." These authors developed their arguments using little more than reflection as a research tool. This reflection did not occur after collecting data through some other means and therefore raised serious questions of validity in my mind.

The review of literature on physical activity and young children, did not reveal a single study describing the child's perspectives on their own lived experiences. The articles failed to consider the sense of what it was like to <u>be</u> that child. I could therefore empathize with the frustrations expressed by Barritt (1979):

> Articles which ought to be interesting, which had interesting sounding titles, are not what I had hoped. These articles are full of methodological caution, measurement and statistical analysis. The juice is gone from life in the name of caution and precision. (p.4)

Thus for the purposes of this study I found it necessary to search further than the literature produced by physical education for assistance with the method. This search had both internal and external components to it. The internal search required a reassessment of the purpose of the study. Coles (1972) gave insights with that undertaking:

> Lives as opposed to problems may puzzle the fixed notions of theorists...to approach certain lives, not to pin them down, not to confine them with labels, not to limit them with heavily intellectualized speculations, but again, to approach, to describe, to transmit as directly and sensibly as possible what has been seen, heard, grasped, felt by an observer who is also being constantly observed himself--not only by himself but by others, who watch and doubt and fear and resent him, and also, yes, show him kindness and generosity and tenderness and affection. The aim, once again then, is to approach, then describe what there is that seems to matter. (pp. 21,41).

I concluded that describing "what there is that seems to matter" in the lives of young children engaged in physical activity was a worthwhile endeavour. The internal search was over, at least for a time.

The external search was for the resolution of the method, approach, instrument dilemma. van Manen (Dec. 6,

1982) offered advice in this quest:

> Rather than think of a technique or an instrument first and then examine how you can get at your question, the question must be the beginning. Just think normally and logically of your own ordinary experiences as a child. (p. 4).

Suransky (1982) gave further insights into the importance of keen observation when searching for the essence of a phenomena:

> How then does the researcher, engaged in this particular form of the interpretative act, make visible the existential ground of the everyday life experiences of the child - to give actuality to the commonplace, which is the very "stuff" of the life phase of childhood? Description - clear, vivid, faithful descriptions of the experiences, actors, of words, of phenomena - are central to the understanding. (p. 36)

Recording observation in an accurate and meaningful way is a talent. Although an exhaustive approach to doing research, partially because of the time involvement, it may be the only approach that would result in an accurate description of the world of children. van Manen (Feb. 1983) saw the purpose of a study of this nature as follows:

> To get to the universal dimensions of the physical experience with body - then you are using these children as an occasion to ask the questions. (p. 5)

Words, gestures, and movements as well as purely creative acts the children display (e.g. artwork) can therefore become the researcher's raw data. Critical

reflection on these descriptions would hopefully give the researcher new insights into the meaning structures of the life-world of the child.

Golec (1982) believed that researchers working with children must first simply let them talk and spend time listening to the way they express their feelings verbally. She suggested that a technique that might be used to "get inside the child's perspective" might be stimulating discussion by means of cartoons, games, or other activites that were a part of the child's world.

The task of gaining entry to a suitable school site was not as simple as I had hoped it would be. After visiting three schools in September, 1982, I was fortunate enough to meet Principal Bob and Teacher Susan who agreed to assist me with my study. I wrote a formal letter to Principal Bob outlining my intentions which gave him adequate information to inform the parents of the children involved in the study. I immediately began observing and engaging in dialogue with the children and my data collection continued until mid-June, 1983. (see Appendix 4 - letters)

I proceeded with the faith that given the respect these children deserved they would share their feelings with me. I established an ongoing relationship within the context of a warm and trusting atmosphere. The differences in the life world structures of the children and myself seemed to diminish as time passed. Gradually, I began to <u>see</u> more of their world. Beekman (1983) spoke to this issue:

> As long as we see the actions of little children through the models of our shared adult conventionality, we are not likely to see the world as children, in their own uniqueness, see it." (p. 40)

Discussion of the Method

The final product of this study will be as a written description of the world as viewed through the eyes of children. The accuracy depends on the ability of the researcher to interpret what he sensed while spending time with children. van Manen (Dec. 6, 1982) spoke of a set of methodological procedures in doing this type of situational interpretive inquiry:

> You are doing the describing ultimately and what they give you in the way of talk or what they show you when you look at them, that's the raw material that you make sense of eventually. In other words - their descriptions are not <u>it</u>, their descriptions are not phenomenological, you have to do something with it so it becomes phenomenological or whatever other type of description. (p. 9)

Kass (1983) gave a further clarification of the researcher's role:

> You see, <u>you</u> are the instrument here. (p. 3)

I took certain precautions to ensure that the interpretations of the data I had collected were made without predudice. For example, had I been a very competitive athlete I might have viewed competition as a very favourable element in children's sport. In

anticipation of that kind of distorted view I documented my own philosphy of teaching and coaching young children which I referred to occasionally thorughout the study. In addition I recollected my own childhood experiences as suggested by Suranksy (1983):

> One of the first things I think you should do is try and document your own memories and your own experiences of physical activity -- so you have it written down in terms of your own retrospective data as it were -- what it was like for you to engage in physical activity as a child. (p. 2)

Additionally, I documented experiences I had had with children that seemed to influence the way I was seeing or interpreting the set of situations viewed in the present study. The final image would therefore be created from the merging of several landscapes.

At the outset of the study I spent three weeks in the grade one classroom as a silent observer. The purpose of these visits was to familiarize myself with the children and to take note of the manner in which they expressed themselves. Observations were made in the classroom, gymnasium and playground at recess, noon hour, regular class hours as well as before and after school. The observations were recorded in the form of field notes. After the initial "getting to know you" session, the collection of "raw material" was carried out in a variety of ways.

Small Group Discussion

Various topics pertaining to physical activity were

discussed with groups of eight to ten children. Although there was a good exchange of ideas, this approach tended to prevent some of the children from speaking openly. The shy children tended to "clam up." Initially, I felt a small group might be more conductive to dialogue; but in fact, it was far too impersonal an atmosphere, resulting in an increased number of distractions that caused the children to wander off the topic at times. I also found it difficult to record the reactions of a large number of children at a single time.

Drawings and Discussions of Drawings

Robert Coles (1972) in his book Children of Crisis spoke of having children draw pictures while engaged in dialogue with the children. His contention was that the children tended to relax more when they could focus their attention on something outside the conversation. The artwork could also be used as a further representation of their feelings.

In Coles own words (1972):

> If we would only truly watch and hear children, be alert to what they want to do, the playing they do, the drawings they do, the painting they do, we could learn not only about their daydreams, their fantasies, their obscure or at least unstated strivings or doubts, but also about their more outward attitudes and feelings, which so often are explicity there, waiting to be recognized by the rest of us, who are so convinced of what is right or best or possible for "them, the children. (p. 36)

Using Cole's idea, I integrated discussions about physical activity with artwork. More specifically, the children spoke about their movement experiences as they drew pictures illustrating these same experiences. I had conversations with the children as they drew. (see Appendix 5 for artwork) I recorded the following notes in my field observations during one of these sessions:

> Jay the redhead, appears very active. (hyperactive?) She sits in her desk then stands up and leans over to draw her picture from several different locations around her desk (like she is getting different perspectives). She has a twinkle in her blue eyes and a smile on her face all the time. She jumped up, ran over to where I was sitting in my little "grade one size" chair and drags me back to her desk to show me her crayon artwork. It was a picture of her favorite winter sport. The following conversation ensured:
>
> Neil: Do you always take your rabbit skating Jay? (her rabbit was clearly wearing skates - see Appendix 5)
>
> Jay: Yea....(hesitating)
>
> Neil: Well, what kind of skates does he use?
>
> Jay: Bunny skates! (she breaks out laughing)."

Reflecting on the "bunny skates" story, I realized how important it was to respect the responses the children gave me. I soon began to observe other examples of this "different reality" which eventually was to emerge as a major theme.

No attempts were made to interpret the children's artwork beyond their own verbal descriptions. Had I decided to use the meanings assigned to the artistic expressions within the context of this study, I would have consulted with experts as suggested by Kass (1983):

> Consult with someone like a child psychologist who is conversant with some standard interpretations of children's pictures. I wouldn't try to interpret children's artwork unless one had a great deal of experience.(p. 6)

Shared Experiences in the Gymnasium and on the Playground

The children began asking me to participate in their gym classes and join them at recess. They wanted to share their time with me and requested that I do some "gym things" with them. (the students were aware that I was a physical education teacher - writing a story about them). I decided to teach several movement education lessons in the gym and record the students' reactions during the lessons. This request from the students for my increased involvement spoke to an issue described by Johnson (1978):

> What may be the researcher's theoretical problem is a decidedly practical matter for the members. Not only do the members want to know what the researcher is up to, they also want some plausible rationale which might justify their cooperation. They will talk because they and the field worker are making an exchange, are consciously or unconsciously giving each other something they both desire or need. (pp. 56, 57)

The "thing" that both parties needed was probably mutual respect. Many "subjects' get very little out of research done in their classroom. They may not even acquire a new friend because the researchers are concerned about their "objective stance" and maintaining an uncontaminated site. At one point in this study I too became concerned that I was getting "too close" to the students. They would run over and sit on my knee when I came into the classroom. I became concerned that I might be influencing the children and possibly the validity of the results. van Manen (Feb. 17, 1983) gave me some reassurance:

> Validity means true to life and you're not going to be true to life by staying away from it. You have to be able to get into life yourself to be able to speak to it. I think the closer you get to them the more chances you have to get the lived meanings they may not want to share unless they trust in you, too. They must be willing to talk to you. (p. 12)

From this point on the research stance was opened up a great deal. The approach followed for the remainder of the study was what Beekman (1983) referred to as "participant experience." Although one might say that adults can never be full participants in the world of a child, they can at least become good friends and friendships certainly bring new insights. I found that these friendships were easily developed with the children in my study.

Interviews

The interviews were generally conducted with one or two

children at at time. The term interview might be too formal to describe what occurred as most of these discussions were more like casual conversations. This approach was very successful provided I had prepared for the topics of discussion and approached these sessions enthusiastically. The first transcripts of these tape-recorded interviews were critically reviewed and the resulting comments of several advisors were helpful in improving "the art of interviewing." For example, van Manen (Dec. 6, 1982) made the following comments:

> You see they are giving you a line because you are an adult -- you ask adult questions. (p. 5)

Kass (1983) suggested more attention should be drawn to the basic "feeling type words" that emerge from the children's vocabulary. She drew attention to what she considered to be a fundamental error in my questioning:

> Why is not a good question to ask a youngster. Why is associated with authority. It's associated with school-type authority and also parental authority.
>
> I tend to get a better response when I say -- How are you feeling when you did this? or What were you thinking when you did this?(p. 9)

Dr. Kass went further to suggest that, in addition to pre-planning, working in the setting and post-interview or post-participatory experience analysis, I could incorporate an intermediate step. This step would occur after interaction with the children but before transcription of

the tape. It would involve listening to the tape and recording casual thoughts and observations about the behavior of the children that came to mind. These impressions would then serve as an additional data source.

I noted that the location in which the interviews were conducted was quite critical. The children had to feel comfortable in the setting and yet distractions had to be kept to a minimum. The time of day, day of the week, and occurance of special holidays affected the conduct and enthusiasm of the children. For example, the children were very excited just prior to Christmas holidays and seemed somewhat depressed the day after Valentine's Day. On one occasion I interviewed a child on his birthday, and of course, there was nothing worth talking about other than the upcoming party. When you are six, your birthday can be almost overwhelming.

Story Telling

> Is it ever possible to achieve phenomenological insight? We think so, otherwise we would not be doing as we are. However the answer to these and other questions is always in doubt until the search is completed. Every study is a new act of faith that better understanding the other's point of view is possible. We believe that adults can see the world through children's eyes. None of us can be children again but we can take children's experiences seriously and learn from it. (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, Mulderj: 1979, p. 4)

I continued to have conversations with the children, gathering information and paying special attention to the stories they related. I returned to the children for verification of my interpretation of these stories. My information was collected in the form of detailed field notes (see Appendix 6), transcribed tape recorded interviews (see Appendix 7) and a personal diary (see Appendix 8) that I tried to carry with me at all times.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The Child's View of Physical Activity

The objectives of this chapter are to describe and interpret the experiences and the meanings that children assign to particular situations in which they find themselves while engaged in physical activity. The chapter will give children "equal time" to express their thoughts and feelings about their own lived experiences. My prime objective was to make sense of the situations in a way that was grounded in the children's reality. The narrative will therefore interpret the experience yet still present the experience as naturally as possible.

What follows is a thematic analysis of the children's view of physical activity. The themes will be portrayed with as much real-lived-world data as possible. It should be noted that all the children quoted in the following descriptions were six years of age. The cooperating classroom teacher will be referred to as Teacher Susan in the text.

Winning and Losing

One of the most controversial issues in children's sports is the overemphasis on competitive situations and winning. Numerous arguments have been presented for and against such situations. Some parents feel competition in sports prepares their children for the "dog-eat dog" world

in which they will eventually have to survive. Others feel that their children will only meet their full potential when pushed to excel.

The children had definite opinions on this matter:

Neil: What do you like playing most in gym class?

Bob: Floor hockey is fun because usually we win or tie.

Neil: What if you lost all the time, would it still be fun?

Bob: No.

Neil: You mean it's only fun if you win?

Bob: No...(pauses)...it's fun to tie, too.

Interestingly enough, other students saw much different benefits in sports participation. Chris was a very athletic boy who seemed to excel in a variety of sports and was considered somewhat of a star by his peers. The following conversation concerned his favorite sport soccer, a game in which he scores many goals:

Neil: So, what's you favorite sport Chris?

Chris: Soccer.

Neil: Is soccer your favorite sport because you score a lot of goals?

Chris: No, because you get oranges after the game.

Many children's activities are modified versions of adult games. Are these experiences appropriate for youngsters? How did this emphasis on competition get into children's programs?

If children had the choice, would they elect to set up competitive, win/loss situations? Apple (1979) felt economic needs determined what went on in school:

> If we look at our educational institutions we should expect to find that the tacit things that are taught to students roughly mirror the personality and dispositional traits that these students will require later on when they join the labor market. (p. 1)

Winning was used as a motivational device in many game situations to encourage children to participate. They were required to perform for the benefit of the team. Young children in natural play settings are active, happy, uninhibited, and spontaneous. This is not an unusual image of childhood. However, if we listen to how children described their experiences as participants in adult initiated games the "production of docility in children" that Apple (1979) spoke of started to become more believable. The following is a discussion which speaks to this issue:

Neil:	What did you play in gym class today?
Fred:	T ball.
Neil:	How do you play T ball?
Lee:	There is a cone on a block of wood and you put a ball on top of the cone and then you just hit it with the bat and then you just run around.
Neil:	So what does everyone else do if they are not batters?

Lee: Either you sit down or you are an outfielder.

Neil: And what do they do?

Lee: They catch the ball in the field.

Neil: What's the best position?

Lee: The best job is to bat.

Neil: What's the worst one?

Lee: To be an outfielder because sometimes you never get the ball.

Fred: No, the worst one is to get not a rotten ball but - you have to go out of the game.

Lee: Yea, when you get out.

Neil: Then what do you do?

Fred: Have to go back to the end of the line and wait all over again until your next shot - that's what! Everyone has to take their turns with the crummy jobs.

Lee: Today I never got to touch the ball or use it! I was a fielder all the time and then our gym was over.

This explanation of T Ball from the participants' points of view made me question its appropriateness for young, active children. No doubt it taught positional play, turn taking, learning how to lose, and perhaps patience but it could also be viewed as a frustrating experience for young children. I questioned how much skill was being developed as the children were standing in the field waiting for the ball to come their way. It became quite clear after some

time that "getting out" was a crushing experience for the children.

A second observation concerned the great range of skill levels observable in the class. It was obvious that some children were satisfied to hit the ball and get on base. Other children went to bat expecting to hit a "homer" every time. A situation developed where some children like Lee became frustrated because they had to stand and wait; other children became frustrated because they thought the game was "too easy." Cam and Jim describe the frustrations of the later group:

Jim: I don't like it when the ball is on the tee because you can't hit it. Like I think the ones who can't hit it should use the tee but the ones who can hit it should just throw it up and belt it. Else it's no fun...cause then you're not learning anything...you're not learning anything, you're just...

Cam: Pitching is much better.

Neil: So it's o.k. when you're just learning to use the tee?

Jim: Yea, that's o.k. but when you already know how to hit it, it's too easy...it's no fun...and the people don't even know halfway how to play. Like they don't even...like they're on first base and then I hit it right...they don't even move; then you can't go anywhere.

Neil: Right...

Jim: Yea, because there can't be two people on the base or one is out.

Neil: So how do you think you could make people understand?

Jim: Just...I don't know...just say like every time they are there and don't know how to play I just say "please would you go?" or something and just say "always when I hit it go to the second base or third or home."

One is faced with a dilemma. The skilled children are upset because their peers "don't even know halfway how to play" and the unskilled children are struggling to keep a little self-respect. Lee and Fred concluded that having eight batters and four fielders would be a far more favourable situation but Cam and Jim felt that would be a "sucky" game. How does one resolve the problem?

Orlick (1979) suggests that the key to well-adjusted adults being able to share and cooperate with other people is to teach them as children that they do not have to win in sports to come out on top. He felt that children were becoming irrationally competitive and that the challenges they were made to face in sports should be collective challenges. There is no single solution to this problem; however, it might be easier to deal with if one explored the backgrounds of some young children. Jim offers an explanation for his interest in sports:

> Well...me and my dad when I was a baby, I always played lots of sports when I was a baby. Me and my dad when I was a baby we always catched balls and things like that. We threw them at each other and we played soccer and we played sort of football...touch football.

Sometimes we sort of played baseball...I hit the ball off the tee and my dad got it..except he didn't play as hard. I played all different sports when I was a baby.

By age six, children have experienced a great deal of life. If these experiences were positive ones, as they obviously were for Jim, chances are children will enter school with good attitudes towards sports and confidence in their abilities. It is difficult to build confidence in situations where children are constantly comparing themselves to the winners. Jim's childhood recollections were pleasant ones and he is optimistic that future athletic experiences will be equally rewarding.

Perhaps new insight can be gained by observing children playing in their "own spaces." What are the requirements for a child to call a location his "favorite play space?" How do children transform spaces to make them more "friendly?" These and other questions will be explored in the following thematic analysis.

Child Created Play Spaces

I have a house where I go
When there's too many people,
I have a house where I go
Where no one can be,
I have a house where I go,
Where nobody every says "No"
Where no one says anything - so
There is no one but me.

A.A. Milne - How We Are Six.

I observed several different types of child-created play spaces. In the gymnasium, equipment was often set up with a specific theme in mind. If given the opportunity, children soon devised completely different applications for the equipment. Instead of crawling over barriers, children would find a small space to hide under them. When children were given yet another degree of freedom they would completely transform their environment. I believe this freedom to transform one's environment is important for young children. Langeveld (1983) spoke of this issue:

> Children are not formed and influenced by schooling alone; they are drawn just as much by their own world and their own self-constituted environments. And for this reason children do not need just the formal upbringing of school curriculum; they also need freedom and openness to the beckoning of that which is as yet undetermined and uncertain. We want to observe the child in this situation in order to come to an understanding of the whole child. (p. 11).

Suransky (1983) discovered that when adults were asked to recollect their favorite childhood play spaces, these areas were very often situations they created themselves. A feature that was common in adult descriptions and the study group's actions was the smallness of play spaces. When Teacher Susan gave the children "free play time" they invariably built small enclosures and transformed the large spaces into a series of small spaces. The children then proceeded to pack themselves into these hiding places. I saw this as an indoor version of outdoor fort-building.

Outside the confines of the gymnasium, the children built forts in the bushes in summer and in the snowdrifts in the winter. Cam and Jim reminisced about early fort-building experiences:

Cam: We had fun...we made a fort...and we made it fall on top of us.

Jim: Oh yea remember that?

Cam: And we were...

Jim: Even when we were babies...member...and we wore crash helmets (laughing)...we wore these crash helmets...we wore all these different helmets (laughing)...and we wore these pads.

Cam: And then we made it [the fort] fall down on us.

I observed that, although a playground might appear to be an open area inviting all children, certain territorial rights existed. Sue and Alice explained some of the unwritten rules that controlled play space:

Sue: I like playing in the grass or something like that. I don't usually run around a lot in the field even though I would like to. [the schoolyard was divided into an open field and a playground with equipment]. I'm not used to the field but I'm used to the monkey bars. Because usually by the time you get out...like...the older grades get dismissed a bit earlier because they are already out there and they have started their games.

Alice: So...they like to use the field so much that at recess they don't go over to the playground.

I was able to watch the children through the fall, winter and spring. The changing seasons offered new challenges to the children as they continued to transform their playground:

Andrea: There's a window in the playhouse and some of us jump out of it. We do it in the winter because the snow is so soft.

Jay: You know I used to have this big snow bank and I used to make forts out of it and things like that.

Andrea: Like over there we build big forts but then the grade six graders stepped all over them.

I decided I would teach several movement education classes with the main theme being space awareness. The activities focused on good use of personal and general space. Although it appeared that the children understood the concept of moving into open spaces to avoid collisions they took particular pleasure in running as close as possible to each other and enjoyed "bunching together" on equipment. This behavior was consistent with recess activities where large numbers of children would pack into the playhouse at one time.

A group of tires was vertically "planted" in a corner of the playground. These tires were another favorite play

space; however, activities varied a great deal depending upon the children's ages. Sue explained:

> Well in the tires, we [grade one class] usually climb them and jump off them, but the grade twoers can usually jump from tire to tire. Sometimes the little kids [kindergarten] pretend they are mixing soup in them.

I found that the play spaces most occupied by the children were relatively small in size and in most situations gave children the oportunity to be away from adult eyes. The spaces were often completely constructed by the children as in the case of snow forts. If adult-created spaces were used, children tended to modify them or at least make them more "homey" by bringing in selected artifacts. The following is an example of such a transformation:

Neil:	What was that game you were playing at recess?
Alice:	Rockets.
Neil:	How to you play rockets?
Sue:	We call it a space ship under there. [tire swings]
Alice:	Yea, cause it's shaped like a space ship.

The children went on to explain how they would swing on the tires and let go, allowing them to fly through the air like rockets.

One of the strengths of descriptive research is the wide range of sources one can explore to help understand the lived experiences of children. The following is an example

of the same theme, child created play spaces, illustrated in the recollections of an adult:

> We had a lot of fun at school. I remember one day the teacher went to Hjorring (Denmark) and he told us to stay home for the day. Mother had just knit me a pair of heavy woolen slippers. Instead of going home all us kids stayed all day and danced in the school yard. My we danced hard and fast! As I walked home I realized I had worn the soles out on my new slippers. When my mother asked me how I wore out my slippers in one day I said -- - "oh...we danced a bit!" (C.J. Winther, 95 yrs., 1982)

It was interesting to see how common themes appeared to be emerging from the recollections of a ninety-five-year old man and a six-year old boy. This revelation supported the notion that the recollectins of the lived exeriences of adults can help us understand children. The "things that seem to matter" (Coles, 1972) should eventually be uncovered.

The Blurred Horizons of Reality and Fantasy

A fascinating feature of early childhood research is observing the ease with which children slip into different realities. This ability to become Superman or Spiderman is quite unique to young children. I first became aware of this phenomenon when reading questionnaires completed by the grade one class. The questionnaire was entitled "What I would Learn About" and brought many interesting responses from the students. Jay wanted "to teach my rabbit to skate". Bob expressed an interest in "learning how to make

a bear friendly" and Harry thought it would be fun "to learn how to pet a snake."

A similar survey conducted with a grade two class resulted in far more occupational-oriented activities such as computer operating and model rocket building. It appeared that the special "licence to be imaginative" had expired by grade two.

How, then, does one make sense of children's stories? How does a researcher interpret narratives that do not fit into what would normally be considered rational or authentic thought by our standards? As Kohlberg (1968) put it:

> Young children's responses represent not mere ignorance or error, but rather a spontaneous manner of thinking about the world that is qualitatively different from the way we adults think, yet has a structure or logic of its own. (p. 212)

Gareth Matthews (1983) does an excellent review of Vivian Paley's book Walley's Stories (a collection of discussions with Paley's kindergarten class). He presented the following criticism:

> As Vivian Paley admits, she has not come very close to finding the child's point of view. But that, perhaps, is not so much because the child is handicapped by a primative mentality that is difficult for us adults to understand. Rather, I suggest, it is more because the child, being not yet socialized to turn aside naive questions, is more openly philosophical then we are.
>
> By filtering the child's remarks through our developmental assumptions we avoid having to take the philosophy in these remarks seriously; that way we also

> avoid taking the child and the child's point of view with either the seriousness or the playfulness they deserve.
>
> We tell our children wonderful tales of myth and magic. Then we invite them to reconcile fantasy with reality. When they fail, as we know they will, we sternly call them inconsistent. Why! (pp. 24, 25)

Upon reflection, I concluded that, because the purpose of this study was to describe "what it was like" to be six rather than "why it was this way", the reality versus fantasy question need not be approached so cautiously. Children construct many realities "but it's still a reality, it's a different reality -- it's their reality" (van Manen, 1982). I noted that this kind of issue could have a paralyzing effect on a study of this nature.

Jay had a special interest in animals. The incident described earlier in which she drew a picture of her rabbit skating was just one of her many references to animals. A later picture portrayed her and "bunny" in the deep end of a swimming pool "learning to dog paddle."

When Rudi was asked to draw a picture of his favorite summer sport he depicted a strange scene (see Appendix 9). The drawing portrays him in a soccer field with some strange objects. When asked to explain what was happening in the picture he responded with:

> I'm running after the soccer ball and this space ship comes and sucks me up into the spaceship.

Just when I began to think that the children could not come up with serious observations some very realistic and thought-provoking comments were made about experiences with friends:

Andrea:	Recess is boring.
Neil:	Boring? Why?
Jay:	Because nobody plays with you sometimes - you try to make friends and ...
Andrea:	Jay hardly has anybody to play with-cause people don't like her - except Alice.
Jay:	Chris likes pushes but not me.
Neil:	He likes your what?
Jay:	Pushes on the swings.
Neil:	You mean you push him on the swings and he likes you for that?
Andrea:	Yea, he doesn't like her but he likes the pushes.

I observed Colin on several occasions picking up stones and putting them into his pocket as he left the school at recess. Were they used in a game? Could it be he used them for bartering or was he simply a collector? Finally, when I could find no explanation for this ritual, I approached Colin:

Neil:	Why do you keep those stones in your pocket Colin?
Colin:	To break up cat fights! (he laughed and skipped away)

"Girls don't play tough games"

Neil: Do the girls and boys play the same games at recess?

Lee: Yea...

Fred: No - not always.

Lee: In gym we do.

Neil: But at recess it's different?

Lee: Uh - huh.

Neil: Why is it different at recess?

Lee: We don't play the same games.

Neil: How are they different?

Lee: Like the girls aren't as rough as the boys.

Neil: Why not?

Lee: I don't know. The girls don't like playing baseball and stuff like that - tough games.

Neil: Fred, do you think girls should play tough games as good as boys?

Fred: Not as good no - but they could still play them if they wanted. I don't think they like them too much - that's why. If they like them a lot then they could. Right Lee?

Lee: Uh - huh.

Neil: Well, why don't they like them?

Fred: I don't know - I don't have any idea, do you Lee?

Lee: Yea - well you just have the feeling that you won't like it.

The majority of physical education classes were structured around movement education themes. The children were involved in a large variety of individual activities and very little emphasis was placed on group or team activities. Teacher Susan did not structure competitive sports during gym time as a general rule; therefore, Fred's comment that girls and boys played together in gym class was correct.

Lee's comment that girls did not like to play "tough games" at recess was also accurate. On more than one occasion, the girls refused to play team games outdoors and stated emphatically that "girls don't have to be good at these games."

The gender issue began to trouble me as the study proceeded and a majority of the class members' opinions were revealed. Almost the entire class believed that boys were better than girls in almost all physical activities.

Colin and Rudi even went so far as to speculate why boys might be superior to girls in sports. They attributed their superior skills to agility, speed, age, and possibly nutrition. The boys made the following comments:

Neil:	Do you think boys are better than girls in sports?
Rudi:	(laughing) Yea.
Colin:	I think boys are better. Like when we let girls play ball tag they always miss us because we trick them.
Rudi:	Like when they're coming to the side we

are on we just go [demonstrates a quick sideways movement] and then run behind the house [playhouse].

Neil: I bet they're surprised.

Rudi: Yea (laughing).

Colin: Yea, when we play hockey with the girls - we might win because we can go like this (dodges) and we can go back and forward like this. [quick movements] Like when they are coming up to us we just go like this [quick sideways movements] and we might get it in the goal.

Neil: Where did you learn how to do those things?

Colin: At school, cause we play all the time and us boys move like this [demonstrates].

Neil: So the girls don't know how to do these tricks?

Rudi: No they don't know how to do these tricks?

Neil: Why don't they know how?

Rudi: Well, because they haven't really learned...I've got to think about it. Well, maybe they were born after us, and they aren't as old as us - so we know more.

Colin: We are a little bit faster than girls.

Neil: Why are you so fast?

Colin: Because I eat a lot. Yesterday I ate apples and toast with Cheeze Wiz on top of it. When it was recess I was running and a girl was running and I was running faster then her.

Neil: Why were you faster?

Colin: Because I ate a lot and used long steps.

The most extreme example of early socialization into stereotypic gender roles was observed when one of the boys commented that girls were better at "cooking sports" than boys. He suggested that they do have contests in cooking where one can win prizes. The girls promptly agreed.

The unfortunate fact was that, although the boys were more skilled in a variety of specific activities and knew how to "trick" girls as Colin and Rudi suggested, there were no physiological reasons why the boys should have outperformed the girls.

Further observations supported the work of Gronbeck (1981) and showed that the girls were more interested in the social and aesthetic aspects of sport participation. More than half of the girls were involved in some form of extra-curricular dance programs. Sue and Alice explained the "dance scene" in their neighbourhood:

Sue: My mom said ballet was so full I'm probably going to jazz.

Alice: I'm going to take ballet probably or maybe tap.

Sue: The Edmonton School of Ballet way down there is really crowded. Almost all the kids in our neighbourhood either used to or are taking ballet this year. Like last year people in two houses down...a little tiny girl took her first lesson. It wasn't that crowded then because nobody really...it wasn't the best thing then...but this year there's people straight after school who had

> rehersals...and they had to do this big play at the Jubilee...they had to have such a big play because there were so many children they just...they had to have stuff like bees and bumblebees...they had to have every little simple thing to get everyone in.

This little story of the hassles of getting into dance school was also an example of the programmed lives of many young children.

Lee pointed out some practical reasons why boys could perform better than girls and Fred finally conceded that girls were superior in some activities. The following conversation explains their stand:

Neil: Are girls better at some games than others?

Lee: Well some..

Fred: Not tag!

Lee: Yes, when they are dressed for it sometimes they are better. Sometimes girls are better at tag than boys.

Fred pondered the question for a few moments and proceeded to express his opinion:

Fred: No, usually it's the monkey bars or stuff where you are better. Twirling around and stuff like that.

Neil: But at tag boys are better? What makes you good at tag?

Lee: The way you are able to run. Boys can usually run faster. There is a tag on the monkey bars though - monkey bar tag.

Fred: Oh yea, you have to climb a lot. Girls would be good at that.

I saw the gender issue as a real dilemma in the school system. Although the children participated in the same activities in gym class, as soon as they went outside at recess or were involved in extra-curricular activities, the socialization process took over. These kinds of sexual stereotypes were only part of the total enculturation process, a process that began at birth.

Favorite Activities

The children were observed playing a variety of games at different times of the year. I attempted to have the children describe and illustrate their favorite summer and winter sports.

On one occasion I watched the following game develop:

> Four children, two boys and two girls, started jumping from one piece of equipment to another in the playground. The children soon decided to play a tag game with one person being "it" who would then try and tag the other three. After a few quick tags the children introduced the rule that those being chased would not be allowed to leave the equipment. This proved to make tagging too easy and a "one step" rule was added which then allowed one step off the equipment. The problem then arose concerning what to do with tagged children. Initially the tagged person became the new "it" but later a rather complex solution was agreed upon: Each of the four children picked five dandelions. Every time a player was tagged or fell off the equipment they had to give "it" one of their dandelions. At this time "it", in

an almost ritualistic manner recited the verse:

> "Mamma had a baby but her head popped off"
> The "it" then slid his fingers up the stem of the dandelion and "popped off" the flowered "head."

When the children were questioned as to where they first heard the dandelion verse, no one could recall.

Another popular game played at recess was ball tag. Rudi described the game:

> Rudi: Like someone has the ball and the people try to hide so they don't get hit because if "it" hits them they have to be "it". Only one person is it except if we have two balls.

In ball tag, the children introduced a variety of rules where players could run to escape "attack" and what part of the body was an acceptable target. The children policed their game and hitting someone in the head was a definite breach of regulations. On one occasion a player was "banished" from the game for a day because of this very infraction. Most of the students agreed that ball tag was an excellent game. Although many of the students claimed they were not afraid of being hit, Rudi did mention:

> "If it [the ball] was going towards their head they might duck down."

A game similar to ball tag was initiated shortly after the first snow fall. The students knew that "snow ball tag" was not allowed on the school grounds (even though snow ball tag appeared safer than regular ball tag) and were faced

with a temporary setback as they considered their options. Would it be more acceptable to go off the playground to play the game? Should they wait until after school hours? The solution came when a student suggested "it" would have to "place" the snowball on his target rather than throw it, thus circumventing the temporary roadblock.

I spent a considerable amount of time investigating "the most fun things" the children liked to do. Lee gave the following reasons for her interest in ballet:

> You learn new things and you learn how to make your body do very soft movements. Like moving your arms very slowly.

When Fred was asked to differentiate between the sensations he experienced while skating, running, and biking, he responded with:

> In a way - no it [running] isn't like skating because you get extremely hot if you go fast skating and you get quite cool if you run - which feels pretty good - but the thing about a bicycle is it's just sort of fun to go fast.

Harry came up with the following reasons why he liked the playground so much:

> It's fun to play outside on the playground because there are so many things - for example there is the climbing frame made of pipes, there are the monkey bars - two pairs of them - actually three if you count the blue ones - we like to go up and down those bars. That's why I think it's lots of fun to be out there.

Skating was a popular activity and both the boys and girls showed equal interest in it. When asked why skating was so much fun Lee replied:

> It really feels like I'm dreaming - I go so fast - usually in my sleep I roll around fast - that's why. I would like to take some lessons and learn how to do a front flip on skates.

Sue on the other hand enjoyed skating but was disgusted with her skating ability. In her own words:

> I can't skate! - I can put my own skates on - and move around the rink - but I can't skate.

Fred agreed that walking around the skating rink was not skating but, in consolation, added:

> Sue, when you first start to skate it's very, very hard.

Cam was an excellent hockey player and like many of the boys, felt hockey was more fun than anything else. Most of the boys could quote their goals and assists for several years back. Part of the reason Cam enjoyed this sport so much was because his friend Jim played with him. As was the case with many favorite activities, they became important because of the context of some relationships which grew out of the situation. As Cam explains:

> We are on each other's hockey team we..we met each other..like we met each other when we were babies. Like..three of maybe four years ago.

Swimming was another favorite activity for children in the class. Lee was particularly interested in learning how

to dive but was troubled with a few concerns:

Lee: I want to learn how to dive - which I've never done

Neil: Why haven't you ever tried it?

Lee: I always think it's scary - and they're [diving boards] always at the deep end. I've walked out on a diving board once and it looks as - it looks like when you look into the sea. Why do they always put them in the deep end?

Fred was quick to offer reassurance:

"But it's not that deep - if you pop up - that's what my dad told me - when you come down always you come up once - and then you have to swim. Never worry about staying down there. If you know how to swim - it's simple isn't it?

The majority of the children chose outdoor, non-competitive activities as their favorite pastimes. Generally, no formal structure existed and the joy was in the doing rather than in winning. In the child-created games, changes were made in the rules until a suitable compromise was reached. No major problems arose until adult games were played by children who did not have the skills to handle them.

Work and Play

Among the revelations the child has brought us, there is one of fundamental importance, the phenomenon of normalization through work--It is certain that the child's aptitude for work represents a vital instinct; for without work, his personality cannot organize itself

> and deviates from the normal lines of its construction. Man builds himself through working. (Montessori, 1963, p. 208)

I became interested in the child's perceptions of work and play largely because of similarities that could be seen in the study classroom and the Montessori setting described by Suransky (1982). What characterized hard work and hard play for the children? Was gym class work or play for the children? Does work generally involve unpleasant tasks?

There was little doubt that the classroom setting made a distinction between work and play. Teacher Susan could be heard commenting "you were good little workers today." Work was rewarded with the opportunity to play. There appeared to be some form of a hidden curriculum (Apple, 1982) filtering through. I do not think Teacher Susan was any different than the average teacher in this respect. A general tendency toward teaching in this way can perhaps be attributed to growing up in a society that makes such a distinction between work and play.

Suransky (June 7, 1983) made the following comments on this situation:

> It's interesting in terms of the whole notion of labor, for example, in Marx's writing - being authentic, meaningful, purposeful activity and transpose that on to the world of the child - it appears that play is perceived as play very often when it's meaningful, purposeful and often creative and transformative whereas work is routinized, dull and adult controlled. It would be interesting to see whether their perceptions of what

> is fun and play and what's dull and work - if those are the kind of things that go together. What emerges from the experiences? (p. 3)

Unstructured, outdoor activities appeared to be the most enjoyable experiences for the children. For example, ball tag with its anxious moments was much more popular than T ball. Ball tag involved less organization, was child initiated and had a high activity yield. Although gym class was popular it was not as big an attraction as recess. Some children saw little difference between gym time and classroom time:

> Neil: Do you like gym class?
>
> Rudi: Yes.
>
> Neil: Why is gym class different from being in the classroom.
>
> Rudi: It isn't any different, it's the same.

After questioning several other students, I learned that Teacher Susan had been integrating arithmetic with physical education for the past few lessons. This sounded like a fun activity and something I would have considered trying with the children Sue had another opinion on the matter:

> I hate playing this game called magic numbers. You have a ball and a bat [paddle] and you have to - what you do is when she [Teacher Susan] calls-say she says magic number is two - you have to get up and bounce it two times and sometimes she says - like thirty and I don't

like that - it's hard because you can't go over or it's a mistake."

I had the opportunity to teach eight gymnastics lessons to a grade one class in another school setting. I used this occasion as an opportunity to explore futher the work/play issue. The lessons began with a series of stretching exercises followed by locomotor activities (making body shapes followed by skipping, hopping, and jogging.). The remainder of the lesson was structured to allow the children the time to move from station to station in the gymnasium performing various "tricks."

The lessons were designed to allow the children increased control over the content of the lessons each time they came into the gym. The children were never told "you can do whatever you feel like", but were asked "what would be a good thing to do now?" As the children began to realize they were gaining power and consequently control, they began to reduce the rather boring warm-up portions of the lessons. They then said, "Now we'll play." The inference was that the structured part of the lesson had been work.

I concluded that the children often "performed" in class because they had no other choice. Children are in a totally powerless situation in class and if they do not do as requested they can easily be labeled "bad kids". Being a success in gym class often necessitates "pleasing the

teacher" at all costs. Often the docile child is rewarded while the aggressive child is scolded.

It would be wonderful if teachers had the energy and talent to make every class exciting, every class an adventure. Teachers who undertake this task feel that they must initiate all new ideas. This is a sure cause of early "burn out." Suransky (June 7, 1983) offered an interesting alternative suggestion for curriculum development:

> What would happen in a situation that is ongoing is that the children become more involved in participating and you find them taking over and generating further creative ideas; your role changes or your place in the situation. As it changes you become more of a participant in their world with them as co-learners and sometimes co-teachers - so you don't play that kind of designing and often burdensome role initially working so hard to make every experience a fresh one. In a way, it gets its own momentum. You would generate your own structure together with your kids which gets a set of rituals and patterns but they'll be different patterns. (p. 4)

Running

> Children use their bodies in different ways to get from place to place. In infancy they find out how to shift their weight from one part to another, so discovering wriggling, sliding and crawling movements that enable them to move around. A significant advance is achieved when they learn to walk. At school, in movement classes, they are encouraged to continue experimenting with weight transference as a means of extending their range and control of movement. (Department of Education, London, 1974, p. 26).

I observed the children participating in a great variety of running experiences. Running was often a spontaneous act rather than a movement carried out for some specific purpose. That is, adults generally run for a specific purpose; for example, to keep or get fit, when involved in a sport, or when they are late for commitments. For the children, running was often an expression of good feelings. van Manen (Dec. 6, 1982) spoke of this phenomena:

> Spontaneous running is a different kind of being in the world entirely. Because now I see no purpose I just do it - right? In that running, a child is really a child. Maybe the essence of just running is that there's no time at all, there's a sort of absence of time, it's one of those few times in one's life that time seems to be just no where. Whereas running for another purpose, time is very much involved - the point of running is time iself. (p. 10)

A secondary theme, children's closeness to the environment, emerged with many of the running experiences the children spoke about. The following discussion illustrates this alliance of themes. Fred and Lee are discussing Fred's picture (see Appendix 10).

> Fred: I don't run only on - yea I run only on sunny days.
>
> Neil: Have you ever run in the rain?
>
> Lee: Only with my raincoat on - which it's too small - so I don't have one.
>
> Neil: Do you think it would feel different to run in the rain than to run in the sun?

Fred: Yea, it feels better to run in the sun doesn't it? Way better.

Neil: Why?

Fred: Because - because your raincoat gets in the way, you stumble then you get your knees hurt when you fall it's no good.

Lee: What I like doing most is running around our block.

Running was an activity in which the children participated alone and in groups. As Lee mentioned, "If there's too little people - you get lonely." Jay conversely preferred running by herself at night:

> I like runnin' by myself. I like runnin' outside in the night because when I go outside in the morning it gets too noisy. I get to bring a flashlight at night.

Running took on another meaning when it was no longer just a spontaneous activity. For Harry, running was a time to share with his father:

Harry: I like running with my dad.

Neil: Do you and your dad talk when you run?

Harry: Sometimes, not always - we run up to the corner store sometimes. We buy candy bars and pop. Last Sunday I went jogging with my dad up the Saskatchewan Drive to the Workman's Compensation Board and over to the corner store.

Lee gave some insights into children's understandings of the time element of running. Her interpretation of "speeding up time" emerged in several conversations. Adults

often ponder ways to accelerate the passing of time; Lee had a solution:

Neil:	When you are going out for recess - do you walk out?
Lee:	Run.
Neil:	Why?
Lee:	Then you get more time to play outside.
Neil:	What about when the bell rings and it's time to come into the school - what do you do?
Lee:	I run in to get home from school earlier.
Neil:	If you run in do you get home earlier?
Lee:	Yea - because then it feels like a fresh new day.
Neil:	So if you run in from recess it's like a new day starting?
Lee:	I feel like...I feel like I'm running in from when the bell rings at the start of the morning and then she [Teacher Susan] says "time to go home" and I run home.

The children used foot races as a means of determining who was the "best" athlete in class. On some occasions races were a part of gym classes but often they arose from challenges between two students. Boys were considered to be faster runners than girls and therefore better athletes. Chris and Harry explain their reasoning:

Chris:	Boys are the best runners.
Neil:	Why?
Harry:	Because they're stronger.

Chris: ...and that makes them faster runners...and girls can't lift heavy things.

Harry: We're built for being really tough.

Neil: Girls can't be tough?

Chris: Uh-uh [no].

Neil: Why aren't they tough? Did someone just tell the girls, "Hey, you can't be tough?"

Harry: God made them that way - so they wouldn't be tough.

I observed a variety of other running experiences that took place under more formal conditions. The annual track and field day was an example of such an event. Competitions were designed to determine who was best in a number of events. The "agony of defeat" was visible on the faces of many of the children.

Running was fun until it became a means of testing one student against another. Being the last runner in a race can be an agonizing experience. The class was quick to realize who the "losers" were. I once witnessed a game of dodgeball that illustrated this point rather well. It is also an example of the lack of humanity children can occasionally show to each other. The incident occurred as follows:

> Two teams of children were playing dodgeball. The idea of the game being to eliminate the team in the center of the circle by tagging each member with the ball. The "attackers" in this particular game identified the best "dodger" and pursued him until successful elimination.

The remainder of the players were subsequently tagged leaving the slowest runner to the end. By the rules of the game if the attacking team does not successfully tag the lone survivor after ten attempts, his team returns to the circle. Of course in this case the poor runner was quickly cleared out.

Not to be outdone, the team that won and gained the right to go into the circle instructed the poorest "dodgers" to "throw themselves" in front of the ball, in an almost sacrificial manner, protecting their best runner for the standoff at the end. The best runner of course had the best chance of surviving the last ten throws.

Running was most meaningful in the context of special relationships - parents and friends. The joy of running disappeared for many children when it became a means of identifying skill levels or winning in competition against peers. In such circumstances, the joy of running suffers because it is perceived as an evaluative tool.

Solidarity and Friendship

When children were asked to recollect the beginnings of friendships, the first significant events they recalled were generally some form of physical activity they engaged in with friends. Unlike many adults, chidren do not involve themselves in extensive negotiations before they consider taking on a new friend. A child's ability to remember details provides an indication of how important these experiences must have been. Cam and Jim recollect the highlights of their friendship:

Jim: Except...I guess it was that we...I thought we wouldn't be best friends anymore because we would have had enough of each other.

Cam: Like we always tease each other...

Jim: Yea...sometimes we fight because we know each other.

Neil: What do you do as friends together?

Cam: We make forts.

Jim: Ride bikes.

Cam: We double on our bikes when we only have one.

Jim: ...and once we fell..member when we always fall? Member?

Cam: Yea.

Jim: Once...once...

Cam: Jim got off...I told him I was going to do something and then I rode away on him. [laughs]

In the majority of instances when children were asked what they liked doing with their friends, some form of physical activity was the answer. Movement experiences therefore not only initiated friendships but helped to maintain them. Sue spoke of her long-term friendship:

> My best friend across the street, she has a big pool and sometimes we race each other, except when our other friends are over we race in teams and we count points and we also play exactly the same as tag except we call it "jaws". Someone is "jaws" instead of "it" and we play it in the pool because - everyone is swimming around in the shallow end so if he [jaws] goes out there he has to pick someone else. So we can go there - it's like home free.

The friendships children enjoyed were nurtured by the physical experiences they shared. Once again, the need for safe and stimulating environments came to the forefront.

Fighting

I am always amazed to see how many children fight as a means of entertaining themselves at recess breaks. The children referred to two forms of fighting: play fighting and real fighting. Play fighting was something the boys participated in on a daily basis. How and why children are influenced to fight for fun could be the focus of another research study; however, it is obvious that television viewing has a great impact. Children were heard making reference to "Mr. T" and other television "tough guys." No formal combative instruction took place in physical education classes. The mock fighting generally took the form of one child harassing another child, followed by a chase, a tackle and a good deal of rolling around in the grass or snow. Jim and Cam gave examples of appropriate occasions for play and real fighting:

Cam: Once when we were outside Jim flipped me.

Jim: Once I was at the park and I took your arm...remember...and I took you over my shoulder and flop!

Neil: Didn't you get angry about that?

Cam: No, I only got sand stuck in my face.

Jim: Yea, I threw him into the sand pit.

Neil: So when you are best friends you can get away with

things like that?

Cam: Yea, if he wasn't my best friend I would kick him. Know Chris...in our class...he's on the soccer team too...he was kicking then he said "you want to play karate" and then he goes chop [shows hand movement] then I flipped him and he rolled down the hill.

Jim: Member when he karated me right on the back and I said "hey mister I'll karate you back" and I flipped him down the hill, too.

I did not witness any real fight during the course of the study. Several major disagreements occurred concerning unfair play in games but peaceful settlements were negotiated. Play fighting, however, would be ranked as the second most popular "low organized game" next to ball tag.

It may well be that play fighting is just another form of exericse and, like it or not, parents and teachers may have little control over its occurrance. A parent related the following incident on this topic:

> I was concerned that my son would develop bad attitudes towards physical violence. My wife and I decided we would not have a television set in the house and would not allow him to have any play guns or any other type of play weapons. To my dismay one morning he took his piece of toast, shaped it into the crude form of a gun and said "bang I shot you."

The fighting issue should be looked at in more detail. Parents should be aware of how deep an influence the "macho" images of television personalities have on their children. Cochran, Wilkinson and Furlow (1975) found that

the average child watches over 5000 hours of television during his preschool years. More attention should be focused on the quality of the experiences children are involved in during these formative years. The assault course for young children set up at CFB Petawawa, Ontario, is an example of a negative learning experience for children (see Appendix 11).

Challenge, Risk and Danger

Many of the activities the children enjoyed participating in had inherent elements of danger. Although the children were aware of this risk they never admitted it concerned them. Robert, for example, claimed to be an avid water skier and constantly made references to his skiing excellence:

Robert: I like doing water skiing. It's fun. Do you know how to water ski? Do you know how to do jumps? I do.

Neil: Don't you ever get scared?

Robert: No. If it's bumpy - no. I've done lots of jumps - but when you go off water skis and do jumps it's hard to land. I've been practicing for two years.

There was little doubt that the children enjoyed challenges and these challenges often held elements of danger. The "outer limits of performance" of the playground equipment were constantly tested. Swings were "pumped" until the chains went slack as the children reached a position close to parallel with the ground. The logical

conclusion to this feat was jumping off the swing and seeing how far one could fly through the air. I think we all tried this at one time or another.

The children were constantly climbing on the playground equipment. They experimented with different ways of getting on and off the equipment. Several activities like jumping off the roof of the playhouse were prohibited. This jump, of course, held the most attraction for the children.

Climbing was not limited only to equipment; the qualities of good climbing trees versus bad climbing trees were discussed on several occasions. Jim was paricularly pleased with the new home his family recently moved into. He highlighted the special features:

> We got two good climbing trees in the front yard and two good climbing trees in the back yard.

The boys also performed "daring feats" on their bicycles. Bicycles are children's main form of transportation and they are very knowledgeable on the subject. Harry felt that, aside from being a challenge, bike tricks were another example of how boys were better than girls. He makes his point as follows:

Harry:	Boys are better on bikes cause they can do cat walks down the street.
Neil:	What's a cat walk?
Harry:	Well you do a wheelie and then you stay up for about ten seconds - no twenty five - me and Jim can do them for about twenty five seconds.

The children who were willing to take the occasional risk showed the greatest amount of self confidence. No doubt there was a fine line between being challenged and being "turned off" by failure. There was also a big variation between the goals children set for themselves and the goals adults set for children. For example, the children were happy to be able to do some form of a headstand in gymnastics. It was their goal to try to get their feet above their head. I found myself saying "point those toes" instead of "what a great trick!" Their goal was to have fun experimenting with body shapes, my goal was to make gymnasts out of them.

The children exhibited varying opinions on what they hoped to gain from the challenging situations in which they were involved. Chris made the following comments about hockey:

Neil: Why do you like hockey so much?

Chris: Because umm - you get to try to shoot the puck sometimes. Sometimes you get to have a time when you have to play the game and you get a time for free activity. I'm not on a real hockey team.

Cam was an agressive hockey player and judged his performance solely by the number of goals he scored. He summarized success thusly:

I only got fifteen goals in the season and eighteen assists. Ken got one hundred and thirty seven. He's an excellent player even though he's in kindergarten and

we're in grade one. He just rips across the ice. Every time he's got the puck he scores.

Some children were able to challenge themselves adequately interacting with the environment around them. Other children sought more structured situations. The children who enjoyed "testing" themselves through interaction with other youngsters had a good general awareness of their own athletic abilities. The following conversation illustrates this point:

Neil: Who is best at sports in your class?

Cam: Me and Jim are best in hockey. I'm pretty good at lots of sports.

It appeared that the children who had poorly developed motor skills chose to stay clear of competitions that would draw attention to their weaknesses. These were the children who stayed in the background shadows. There was not enough time to help the "poor movers" and I suspect these children will become more removed from athletics as they grow older. The children who were "stars" were skilled both because their parents encouraged them and the children themselves had a good deal of natural athletic ability. The curriculum did not meet the needs of all the children.

Powerlessness

Many parents and teachers feel that they are totally responsible for the way their young children are "moulded" into effective participants in society. Children are often

seen as formless pieces of clay and the final shape that they assume could be ascribed to the characteristics that others decide they should assume. According to this philosophy, the child's role should be a very passive one. The safest strategy is often to please the teacher, parent or coach at all costs.

There is some difficulty in assessing children's behavior if one does not appreciate the powerless role children experience. The children showed an obvious "desire to please" in conversations I had with them. As a grade one student, one must submit to the wishes of the teacher, the principal, the janitor, the secretary, and all of the other students with the exception of kindergarten. The children in this study spent a good deal of time trying to keep everyone else happy with their performance. This dilemma becomes more problematic, when, for example, coaches encourage their young players to become more aggressive in team sports such as hockey. They do not want to go out and body check another player; at the same time they, however, feel that they will be looked at in disfavor if they do not.

The following are answers the children gave to the question "Why do you like sports?"

Robert: Well, you get lots of exercise.

Lee: Oh - it help you keep fit.

Chris: You get stronger.

Jay: It helps you lose weight.

It was highly unlikely that Jay was really concerned about weight loss; however, her response was a "safe" answer to the question. Children went through class "playing it safe" and as a consequence I believe a good deal of creative talent went to waste. Dialogue that could have taken place between the student and teacher was often stifled. No doubt the limitations of time made it difficult for the teacher to allow all children the time to express their opinions, more effort could have been focused on student-initiated activities. The curriculum, rather than the students was taught.

Six year olds are small in stature, financially dependent on their parents for food and shelter, do not verbalize very well and lack many of the social skills adults possess. For these reasons, children are constantly being told what to do and are expected to do it without question. Adults must become more sensitive to the needs and feelings of children. They may not spend twenty hours a week in the swimming pool training because they love swimming. It could very well be that they feel that they do not have the right or authority to disregard their parents' or coach's wishes. It is not difficult for adults to get children to work hard in sports if the right motivational techniques are employed.

Insight Developed Through the Context of Relationships

As in most school settings, the children were not allowed to make major decisions on their own. This was not

to say that they were not capable of decision-making or had no opinions on issues concerning their schooling but rather that they were not given the opportunity to express themselves. Many adults feel that children do not say meaningful things, and, even if they were able to verbalize better, they would not know what was good for them anyway since they have experienced so little of life. As a result, children listen and respond to adults' requests. The quality of the relationship the children shared with adults affected greatly the quality of the learning experience. Teacher Susan was a very caring person and often assumed the role of parent as much as teacher. The children approached her with all their troubles and joys. At times I felt Teacher Susan considered her students to be an extension of her family.

Although the warmth of the teacher-student relationship was ever present, there was never any doubt as to who was in charge. The children never lost sight of the fact that they worked in an environment under the control of adults. In Teacher Susan's class, a delicate balance was maintained between teacher-as-friend and teacher-as-authority figure. It was my opinion that the children enjoyed their time in the classroom and gymnasium partly because of the pleasant atmosphere Teacher Susan created. This observation supports the contention that the personalities of the individual teachers may have more to do with the success and enthusiasm of children than professional preparation and other factors.

In my conversation with the students, many references were made to experiences shared with parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters. The following are some examples:

Robert: I like playing squash with my grandfather.

Neil: What kind of game is squash?

Roert: Squash is a kind of game something like tennis. My grandpa used to be a champion.

Neil: Do you use a racquet?

Robert: Uh - yea kind of like a paddle bat. It's hard. I played grandpa and he won ten to one.

Chris: I like running with my dad. My dad said they discovered that padding in your shoes keeps your feet from getting sore. You should run a long time in bare feet.

Rudi: I like playing hockey with my brother but sometimes he gets mad and bites me.

The girls made fewer references to experiences they shared with their mothers. It appeared that mothers spent less time actually participating with their children and more time driving them to practices, lessons and clubs. Alice spoke of her mother's involvement:

> You know what...we...we were going to...umm...well I was going to go to just regular dancing but mom just didn't have the time...because she had school...she had rehersal and all that stuff.

The children spoke a great deal about their friends and the time they spent with them. It was my impression that, as much as they enjoyed spending time with their parents and

relied on them heavily, it appeared to be more fun for children to play with their friends. It may be that the children tended to take their parents for granted at this stage of their life and that one only recognizes and appreciates the significance of the interaction with parents in later years.

Whether a child's best friend is his mother or father or the child next door, chances are some kind of shared involvement in physical activity could be viewed as a factor that contributed to the specialness of the relationship. Physical activity can help bridge the gap between adulthood and childhood.

In addition to all their human friends, several children suggested their pets were their best friends. Jay in particular claimed she would rather play with her rabbit and hamster than with other children.

Control of Children by Children

Although the children used running speed as the means of assessing athletic ability, in the final analysis the biggest boys commanded the greatest amount of respect. Two boys, Bob and Robert, were considerably larger than the other children. Several of their classmates commented that these boys would be good football players. They did not "bully" the other children but there was little doubt that they had gained certain privileges. Often these boys were singled out as captains if teams were chosen. The children stayed clear of Bob and Robert in sports like floor hockey

where physical contact could occur.

The second category of children who seemed to have special status were the assertive children such as Lee. These children were able to overpower the others with their aggessive natures. They always got the equipment they wanted in the gym or on the playground primarily because they were fast and louder than anyone else.

Shy children such as Alice had to be prepared to take "leftovers" when it came to equipment or play spaces on the playground. She was so timid that the other children tended to take advantage of her. For example, she was one of the few children who would "give cuts" (allow other children to cut in front of her in a line up), and they often took advantage of this "privilege."

Less aggressive chidlren also appeared to have the poorest movement skills. Often it seemed to be a case of being afraid to touch the ball in a game for fear they would do something wrong. The "good kids" could make errors and get away with it but the children with poorer skills took a lot of abuse if they made a mistake. In competitive situations they would stay clear of the action. I believe more effort should have been made to modify activities so all children were participating and feeling good about their contribution to the game.

Sensitivity to Sense

"Take time to smell the flowers"
(author unknown)

I was amazed with the color and detail of the pictures the children drew for me. My impression after several drawing episodes was that children had an attraction for color and detail in their representations. When I asked Sue to draw a picture of ther favorite activity, ballet, she responded with a detailed drawing of her ballet class showing both inside and outside views (see Appendix 12). Chris produced an equally detailed drawing of himself skating; it included labelled equipment, pathways followed on the ice, and a narrative.

The children's acute sensory awareness emerged in many situations. Parachute activities were particularly popular with the class. The parachute was visually stimulating with its multicolored panels. It was soft and smooth to the touch and, although it occupied a great deal of space, was easy for the children to maneuver. The children also enjoyed making an "igloo" out of the parachute (sitting inside the air filled parachute). The parachute allowed the children the opportunity to make new boundaries to the space they played in and often created an atmosphere of closeness.

Movement education applied to its fullest potential makes an effort to involve a great deal of sensory stimulation. The children enjoyed responding to various sounds through movement. They were excited by the color and feel of equipment. This excitement supports the notion that visual and tactile stimulation contribute to the meaning of the total experience. Perhaps more effort should be made to

integrate other forms of sensory stimulation into physical education classes.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

FINDINGS

Children's Perceptions of Physical Activity

Like most children, the children in this study grew up in an adult-dominated world. Almost all of the children spent a year in nursery school and a year in kindergarten prior to entering the grade one class. I observed the third year of their involvement with institutions and I believe the socialization process had heavily influenced their perceptions by this time.

The children grew up in a competitive world where winners are applauded and losers are often ignored. After constantly being rewarded for great individual efforts, children gradually lost their appreciation for communal involvement. This study supports the idea that childhood is a unique and separate phase of life; however, some of the special qualities of childhood are quickly lost when children enter school. There is a tendency for adults to look at children as imperfect forms of adults rather than individuals passing through a life phase that has its own special form.

Grade one appered to be a transition year where much of the fantasy of childhood was given up by the children as they were immersed in an adult world of rules and rituals. At the beginning of grade one the child would still suggest

that he or she "would like to learn how to make a bear friendly;" by the end of the year, however, children would have learned that this was a foolish request.

Physical activity was a very important part of these children's lives. They were constantly moving in the classroom, gymnasium and on the playground. Movement gave the children a continually changing view of the world around them and a new awareness of the limitations of their bodies. Those children who showed the best movement skills had not developed this awareness through free play alone. These children had been encouraged by their parents to become involved in a variety of planned experiences in physical activity which ensured exposure to a variety of movement tasks and activities. The developmental and individual needs of children must be considered if programs are to be of any benefit. Some parents saw the benefit of integrating the joy of movement with a developing foundation of sensory-motor skills. On the other hand, some parents just pushed their children into thinking that sports aided personal discipline and the development of team work. I think parents often want to give their children opportunities they never had.

The children who were able to express their feelings towards physical activity with the most detail and sensitivity were those who had experienced the greatest variety of activities. I felt that the attitudes and lifestyles of the parents had the greatest influence on

children's perceptions of physical activity. Of course one cannot ignore the tremendous impact television, with its virtual non-stop sports coverage on weekends, has on children.

The perceptions of physical activity also varied a great deal depending on the physical make up of the student being observed. Although most of the children appeared to be reasonably fit, there was considerable variation in their speed, strength and endurance. The children who were "built for speed" obviously enjoyed a great deal more success than the slower students. There is no doubt that genetic factors must be taken into account in describing differences between individual students. If one's mother and father were outstanding athletes, chances are one will inherit some of their athletic giftedness. At the same time, it is difficult to isolate factors influencing motor development from factors influencing the total development of children.

I believe an example of the interconnectedness of the factors influencing total development could be seen in Jay. The children were aware that Jay was a poor runner. As a result, if she wanted to play tag with them she was asked to be "it." Of course, this gave the other children a better chance to escape. Because Jay had little success in this game she eventually withdrew from activities with her peers. She preferred to play by herself or with her pets at home. It could be said that her poor motor skills influenced her social development. She became more withdrawn, avoided play situations and, to some extent, had

developed a very poor self image. By the end of the year she was saying things like, "Chris likes pushes [on the swing] but not me," revealing her awareness that the other children were taking advantage of her. Jay made few attempts to improve her motor skills and thus the cycle continued. Although her lack of motor skills may not be entirely responsible for her emotional difficulties, certainly they had some influence on them.

Children who, like Jim, were athletically gifted (partly because of more favourable genetic endowments) experienced the opposite effect. Their advanced motor development helped make them more socially acceptable and emotionally stable. Physical activity was a positive experience; they were anxious to improve their skills and as improvement became evident, they gained more respect and status.

There is little doubt that nurture played an important role in the development and behavior of these children. The constant and continuing interaction between the children's environment and their genetic inheritance produced the result I observed. Those children who came forth with the deepest and most detailed accounts of their perceptions were the same children who displayed above-average motor proficiency. I believe that these children grew up in an environment that encouraged them to develop their upper ranges of genetic potential.

The perceptions of the girls also varied a great deal

from those of the boys. There was a large category of activities, "tough games" as Lee stated, that the girls did not find at all appealing. In addition, there was an overwhelming opinion that the boys were more skilled at sports with the exceptions of skipping, climbing, dancing and "cooking sports."

The Child Created World

If children had a choice, they would probably play in locations away from adult eyes but at the same time, not too far from the security of home. Most of the favorite play spaces observed or described in this study included some kind of "fort" or rudimentary shelter which served as a "base of operations." The forts often had admittance restricted to close friends or animals. These shelters were often embellished with childhood artifacts such as stones or bottles.

The games the children played were generally very simple. There were special efforts made to keep rules fair. If the game was no longer fun, participants would simply walk away, bringing the game to a sudden end. Such an action differed from more formal adult initiated games where children might have to "grin and bear" a thirty-three to two loss while showing they are good sportsmen.

The children slipped easily between the "real" world and a fantasy world. They often pretended to be characters from various superhero shows, identifying with Superman or Spiderman by wearing appropriately labelled shirts or

toques. The children even had immaginary friends with whom they would talk and play. They were willing to share these fantasies openly.

It is difficult for me to understand why there is such a division between boys and girls in organized sports. When the children played together for fun they did not always divide teams according to gender. They also did not put a heavy empahsis on winning and, in fact, often lost track of the scores. The gender issue came to the forefront when sports were used instead of low-organized games in which winning is a secondary factor. The boys enjoyed playing with the girls but learned from experience that girls were generally less skilled than they.

The Adult Imposed World

Children are the powerless majority in the school setting. Although the institution purported to be serving the needs of the students, the "needs assessment" was conducted entirely by adults. At times, schools give the impression that children are not welcome. The "home time" bell rang at 3:30 and at 3:31 the janitor was in the classroom vacuuming. The children didn't really leave their room at night - they "made a run for it." Rules and regulations that made little sense to me or the students were enforced. For example, there was a girls' entrance and a boys entrance from the playground. Upon entering the school children had to remove their footwear; adults did not. Of course there was the ritual of lining up before

entering and leaving the classroom, art room, music room, library, outside door, gymnasium, and in front of the water fountain. It seemed to me that a good deal of time was spent saying "all right kids - line up." Being quick to clean off one's desk or pull on one's jacket could be rewarded with a foreward position in the line; however, talking while in line could result in a demotion to the back of the line.

The entire physical education program was designed by adults for chidren. The children responded the way they were supposed to - they were quiet and obedient.

Conclusions Regarding the Methodology of the Study

I was satisfied that the approaches used to gather information were appropriate for this study. My decision to venture into a school setting and share time with children was reached after considerable research and experimentation with other methods of data collection (see Appendix 13). Over the eight months of observations and conversations, the children and I became friends and feelings of mutual respect and trust developed.

Upon reflection, I have concluded that the method I chose was "messy" and time-consuming. A great deal of ongoing feedback from many very knowledgeable scholars in the education community gave me the assurance that, while the method may prove frustrating at times, the study was meaningful. I am very grateful to these people because without the benefit of their experience I would have been

floundering with questions of method many times. I realize now that it would have been much simpler to streamline a study and conduct it in a laboratory setting focusing on phenomena amenable to certain kinds of experiments. My biggest concern with that approach was that instead of studying what I considered to be "real world issues" my focus would often have to deal with some isolated process questions.

The approach used in this study gave me the opportunity to move into children's domains and gain a better understanding of what mattered in their lives. Could the real world tasks children are involved in on a daily basis be recreated in a laboratory setting? Even as adults it is easier to remember what it was like to be in grade one while sitting in one's old first grade classroom, feeling the old desk and experiencing that familiar "school smell" rather than trying to recollect from one's easy chair at home. A child's classroom in the school and a room that looks like the classroom but is located on the fourteenth floor of a psychology building are very different environments. We should not necessarily expect to achieve the same research results from these two locations.

The approaches used to gather information in this study were straightforward. I observed the childlren in the classroom, hallways, gymnasium and on the playground. Many hours were spent conversing with the children about their involvement in physical activity. Many more hours were

spent transcribing these conversations. Children's artwork depicting sports interests was used to stimulate further discussions.

In order to employ this method of "data collection" it was essential for me to establish good rapport with the children. Recalling many meetings we had, I realize now how quickly I gave up the notion of them being "subjects" or "informants". They were a great group of youngsters and I enjoyed the time I spent with them. Sometimes I became frustrated with the conversations, feeling that the children were no longer interested because they were continually diverging from "my" topic. I estimated that 75% of the time was spent talking about subjects that had no focus on physical activity whatsoever. Bringing converstions back on topic was an art I developed after several months of pratice. When they started questioning me about our soon-to-arrive baby, I asked them what they could remember about games they played when they were babies (they seemed to regard all children three and younger as babies).

The children and I held our conversations in different areas of the school and surrounding grounds. Teacher Susan would allow me to leave the classroom with one or two children and move to relatively quiet areas to talk. The unoccupied library, music room, gymnasium, and kindergarten were popular choices - the children made the decision. On other occasions we walked outside and they demonstrated different "tricks" on the playground equipment. The

equipment seemed to be a stimulus for conversations. I believe they realized they were finally being given the opportunity to speak on topics where they held unique insights - their own lived experiences.

The children had a limited vocabulary; however, this did not interfere with the expression of ideas to any great extent. A bigger problem initially was my inability to ask questions in "grade one language." For some time we questioned each other until we agreed that the words we were using shared the same meaning.

Conclusions Regarding the Findings of the Study

Involvement in various forms of physical activity was a rewarding experience for most of the children. Enjoyment increased as the children were given the opportunity to exercise some degree of control over the situations in which they were involved. It was important for the children to be able to choose if they wished to participate in activities. I believe a variety of options or alternatives should have been left open for these children at all times.

The children in the study entered grade one with different abilities and weaknesses. I believe that most of them grew up in environments that encouraged the development of motor skills, but, some of the children inherited more athletic potential than others.

The children who displayed the highest levels of motor proficiency had been ecnouraged and assisted by their parents. This group had been exposed to a wide range of

movement experiences and had received feedback from adults who were coaches and instructors. Much of the coaching related to specific activities such as hockey, soccer, swimming, and dance. It was unfortunate that so many of the parents felt the need to call on specialists. I believe a well organized school physical education program could have given these children the kinds of experiences that outside agencies provide. If a high-quality program was offered during the regular school hours, parents might not be so inclined to program the after school hours of their children to the extent I observed. Of course, a program of this nature would require high-quality instruction.

The unskilled children did not display the same hunger to practice old skills or learn new skills. Unfortunately, the majority of the girls fell into this category. This is not to imply that the girls did not have the potential to be as skilled in sports as the boys. Thus the gap between the abstainers and the physically active grew wider. The children at the bottom of the scale could have benefited from a "remedial movement class" to bring them up to par with their peers. The children were well aware of their ranking on this scale.

I did not feel the physical eduation classes significantly influenced children's attitudes towards physical acitivity. The classes were composed primarily of creative movement activities or game situations. More emphasis could have been placed on approrpriate lead-up

activities which would have helped with the acquisition of basic game skills. Children who did not have an adequate repertoire of skills became frustrated in this setting. The movement and activity program was geared more to the motor-gifted, athletically-inclined children. All children should have been assured movement success. Certainly all of them could not be expected to excel, but every child's particular needs for movement tasks could have been met. The children needed the opportunity to experience the control of their bodies through movement while sharing the joy of their expression.

High Quality Learning Experiences for Young Children in Physical Education

After completing this study I had the impression that it was essential for all young children to be allowed to develop their physical skills to their greatest potential. It appeared that numerous factors within the educational system worked to prevent this development.

In the school where I carried out the study, I observed that physical education was not given equal status with other subject area. Children were not expected to reach a specified level of proficiency in motor skills. The goals and ojectives of the lessons had not been carefully defined.

Children have the potential to learn a wide variety of motor skills at a very young age. The acquisition of these motor skills is a complex undertaking and should be

accomplished with due regard to growth and development. Some of the instructional techniques observed in this study did not "make sense" in light of basic principles of motor learning. The children moved from experimentation with movement skills to game situations where these skills quickly broke down under pressure. This was comparable to asking students to write a story before they were able to spell.

Learning how to perform athletic skills, although some are learned naturally, cannot be left to chance. It was my impression that a great deal of "chance learning" was expected to take place in the gymnasium. I felt that the children would have benefited greatly from instructions by a specialist. Only a teacher with a great deal of experience in the field would have the insight and necessary skills to design and implement a high quality program. Parents should not have to search out extra-curricular programs to fill the gap left by the school.

Reflections

The present research was my first attempt to bring meaning to the lived experiences of young children. There was never any question in my mind as to the topic; however, it took several years of searching and enlightenment from a "new wave" of education scholars before I was able to feel comfortable with my approach. In a sense, the approach evolved with the study - not before it.

At the outset, I was concerned that the children might not understand my questions or that I might not understand their responses. As it turned out, communication was never a problem. In the early stages of the investigation I tended to force themes to emerge from the conversations. For example, I might enter the school on a particular day thinking we would discuss running. I would then find out that the children had tried a new piece of equipment in gym class that day and this was all they wanted to talk about. The more I relaxed with the situation the better the conversations became. I concluded that it was probably a waste of time attempting formally structured interviews and that the best approach would be a kind of "guided conversation." The result, of course, was a tremendous volume of material from which I had to extract segments that related to physical activity.

I found it very helpful to recollect my own lived experiences as a child in the context of themes that emerged from the study. It was also useful to listen to other adult recollections. Did they think boys were better than girls in sports? Was winning as important as the children in my study made it sound? The time I spent with these students allowed me to relive parts of my childhood, a time spent in a stimulating environment surrounded by the love of several generations of adults.

There are some ethical concerns that must be addressed. If children show above-average athletic

potential at a very young age, should parents and coaches pressure them to train? Should children give up a good portion of their childhood in the pursuit of excellence in a given sport? There is little doubt that children enjoy the exposure they receive through competitive athletics and in any event would probably not go against their parents' wishes. I struggle with these and other questions as I watch my young daughter discover her body's potential. How much influence should I have or can I have on her decision to become active in sports? When can she decide for herself if it is worth sacrificing play time to train? There may be no answers to these questions.

I believe good curriculum development can only occur when we have a clear vision of the world as children see it. If we believe that teaching is an act of love we should take the time to watch children and listen to what they have to say.

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APPENDIX 1

PARENTS ENCOURAGE EARLY INVOLVEMENT IN

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

HE'S NO SWIMMER, BUT ONE 8-MONTH-OLD KNOWS A BETTER WAY
Little Parks Bonifay made quite a splash when he first got up on skis. "He doesn't know other babies don't do this," explains his mom.
CONTINUED
SKI-BABY
PARK FOR

Coordination Class

Young Kids Learn More than Racquetball

by Rosemary Jeffrey

NATIONAL RACQUETBALL
DEC, 1981

Columbia City Racquet Club Manager Rosemary Jeffrey and Visual Therapist Cindy Diederich offer a three week Hand-Eye Class in a racquetball court. Children walk the red service line, taking care not to fall into the "court floor ocean", before they hit Nerf balls and catch balloons.

Two-year-old Marisa's eyes sparkle and her hands wave as she dances into the court followed by her brother Lyle who, at the mature age of five, is quick to tell me that he will really hit the ball hard today because he has on his Superman underwear. Several other preschoolers come bouncing in close behind them, watching out for Eric and Dominic who are in high gear and ready to play. Elaine and Mandy enter and wait for me to notice their new shorts. And here comes Erin on a dead run, only to be yanked to a screeching halt by ponytailed Kara who tells him to get in the circle, "*or else*". Here we have the new generation racquetball players of Columbia City Racquet Club in St. Helens, OR.

The club is a new family oriented facility along the Columbia River Highway between Portland and the Oregon coast. Drawing from a population of 14,000 people in surrounding communities this club is designed to promote health, fun and fitness for families. To me this means starting preschool children in classes that develop hand-eye coordination and prepare them for the junior racquetball classes that follow. For them today's fun is the stepping stone to tomorrow's racquet skills.

I derived the idea for the class from watching my own two children when they first started playing in the racquetball court. After hitting the ball with their racquets for a while they would drop the racquets and make up their own games, throwing the balls around the court.

Through their self-styled games they were developing the hand-eye coordination so essential to any court sport, along with footwork, quickness, agility and body control. Throwing the small blue balls helped them develop a natural swing and wrist snap that was later transferred to handling a racquet. As they began to spend more time playing with their racquets, I noticed a marked improvement in their skills. It soon occurred to me that with the current emphasis on the relationship between coordination and reading, teaching classes in hand-eye coordination would help children's development in school as well as sports.

In the stretch

Linda Brunt catches her son Timothy, 2½, just before he delivers an overhand down the lane during a recent Big Brothers fundraising bowl-a-thon in Kamloops, B.C.

Winnipeg Free Press, Wednesday, March 17, 1982

APPENDIX 2

MARKETING MOVEMENT EXPERIENCES

IF YOU WANT CHILDREN TO HAVE STRONG MINDS GIVE THEM THE CHANCE TO EDUCATE THEIR BODIES.
TINY TOT FITNESS, INC.
14270 N.W. SCIENCE PARK DR. #605
PORTLAND, OREGON 97229 USA
(503) 644-5800 OR (503) 645-0425

U.S. ACADEMY
NATIONAL PRESCHOOL
GYMNASTICS PROGRAM

'TUMBLE BUGS' Preschool Movement & Gymnastics

The U.S. Academy of Gymnastics Tumble Bugs program is considered the most progressive, innovative movement program available today for preschool children. Our instructors are highly trained, imaginative professionals, actively involved in the growing world of gymnastic education for all ages. Our facilities and lesson formats are considered the best in the U.S. today, and a model program for independent gymnastic clubs throughout the U.S.

The U.S. Academy Tumble Bugs program is designed to help develop each child's individual awareness and coordination. The progressive challenge format presents each Tumble Bug with new experiences and insights into their own physical capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. Independent studies have shown that learning is best achieved through physically doing. Large apparatus, mats, beams and small hand apparatus are used in conjunction with rhythmic and group activities to broaden each child's experience in handling himself.

SESSION DATES

REGISTRATION WEEK	September 8-12, 1980
SESSION I FALL	September 15-December 5, 1980
SESSION II WINTER	December 8-March 13, 1981
SESSION III SPRING	March 16-June 5, 1981

TUITION

$61.00 each three month session, one 40 minute class per week, plus $4.00 registration fee, applicable with initial September registration. Each Tumble Bug receives a U.S. Academy t-shirt upon registration.

PARENT OBSERVATION

The last week of each session is devoted to parent participation and observation. To maintain the most positive learning atmosphere, parental presence is not permissible except during this final week.

TUMBLE BUGS CLASS SCHEDULE

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
9:00-9:40	2 yrs	2 yrs	2 yrs	4½-5 yrs	2 yrs
10:00-10:40	Kinder	3-4½ yrs	Kinder	3-4½ yrs	3-4½ yrs
11:00-11:40	3-4½ yrs	4½-5 yrs	3-4½ yrs	2 yrs	4½-5 yrs
12:45-1:25	4½-5 yrs	3-4½ yrs	4½-5 yrs	4½-5 yrs	Kinder
1:45-2:25					1½ yrs
2:45-3:25					

U.S. ACADEMY OF GYMNASTICS
ALLEN ROAD
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT 06851
(203) 847-4994
(203) 846-4776

APPENDIX 3

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF ATHLETIC POTENTIAL

IN THE SOVIET UNION

Soviets testing infants for gold-medal potential

MOSCOW (AP) — Soviet scientists are conducting genetics tests on infants to identify potential gold medalists in Olympic events.

Studies of genetic markers in children — blood groups and skin types — are part of the sports-research program at the State Physical Culture Institute, the country's leading school for athletes and coaches.

Sports morphology — the selectinn of young athletes on the basis of biological maturity rather than age — is a major area of research at the institute, officials said.

Soviet scientists try to identify children who could benefit the most from early training at elite schools by studying inherited physical traits, X-rays of body parts and typing of muscle fibres.

"We are working out a method for very early forecasting of athletic ability, even in the first year of life, on the basis of genetic markers," said Boris Nikityuk, a leading researcher.

More than 20 blood types are being studied as one indicator of athletic ability, he said.

"We have already proved a correlation between certain skin textures on children's hands and their motor ability," Nikityuk said. "Our objective is to direct kids into sports they are physically best suited for and avoid sports that would not be good for them."

Although Soviet sports-morphology research dates to the early 1970s, Nikityuk said the research on genetic markers is something quite new.

"We are still in the experimental stage," he said, indicating that researchers are monitoring the progress of Soviet youngsters selected in infancy for training in elite sports schools for children.

The 2,000 full-time students at the institute are taught by a faculty of 460. The facility includes 19 gymnasiums, a stadium, an ice rink, indoor running tracks and shooting ranges, classrooms and laboratories.

Communist Party slogans decorate the hallways, underlining Soviet determination to outperform rivals from.

Among the institute's 30,000 graduates are some of the Soviet Union's greatest Olympic heroes, including high jumper Valery Brummel, ice hockey stars Valery Kharlamov and Alexander Yakushev and figure skater Irina Rodnina.

The school's 68 Olympic gold medalists and 68 silver- and bronze-medal winners make up the largest such group of the Soviet Union's two-dozen sports universities.

Among the medalists are many Soviets who were groomed from childhood for Olympic competitions in the country's 6,000 junior sports schools.

The current crop of students includes some fine prospects for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, particularly in fencing, women's field hockey, men's basketball and track and field, institute director Vadim Menshikov said.

Students can specialize in one of 17 sports disciplines or earn a diploma in coaching physical-education courses.

Several hundred foreigners from countries closely allied to the Soviet Union annually attend coaching clinics at the institute, and there are shorter programs of study for sports specialists from North America, Western Europe and elsewhere.

Practical work for the institute's students includes teaching Moscow school children who have shown promise as athletes. The institute also operates an evening sports program for 1,000 youngsters.

Results of the Soviet genetic studies are to be released at an international symposium on sports morphology, scheduled for Poland in June, Nikityuk said.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1983

APPENDIX 4

LETTERS

Letter to the Principal

November 6, 1982

Mr.
Principal
Elementary School
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Principal,

Further to our conversation on October 27th I thought I would send along some information you might require for future reference.

I have been a full time staff member at the University of Manitoba in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Studies for the past five years. The University granted me a two year sabbatical/research study leave which commenced July 1,1982 and will terminate June 30, 1984. I am presently a student in the Faculty of Graduate Studies registered in the Department of Secondary Education. I am classified as an M.Ed. candidate.

Prior to coming to Alberta I was involved in an eighteen month project evaluating a concentration of courses in our Faculty referred to as the Elementary Sequence in Physical Education. In our conversation I indicated my interest in young children and the part physical education played in their lives. Looking at the implication for curriculum development I am particularly concerned that a good deal of our curriculum is based on an adult's perspective of the child's world. The knowledge that children have of their own lives has often been regarded as "low status knowledge". I hope to develope a curriculum that takes into account the lived experiences of young children as defined by the children themselves.

Mrs. Susan has generously consented to allow me to observe and listen to her grade one class. I hope to be able to spend several hours a week over the next eight months doing these observations. I assured Mrs. Susan that I have no hidden agenda, for example, such as an effort to evaluate her work or the general operation of the school;

also that any future publications which may result from this study will fully generalize findings and mask the identities of persons involved. Mrs. Susan and I further agreed that should my presence in her classroom prove to be disruptive, I would terminate the study.

At later stages in the study, I would be pleased to talk with you and your staff about some of my developing ideas; and at the conclusion of the study, I would be prepared to report to all the staff on findings pertinent to their interests. In this way, I hope my work would be of some value, and reciprocate you cooperation in the project.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Neil Winther

/nw.

P.S. Should you need to contact me:

Phone: (days) - 432-3760

(even) - 436-0697

Address:

10924 - 66 Ave.
Edmonton, Alta.
T6H 1Y2.

Principal's letter to parents

December 13, 1982

Dear Parents,

During the past few weeks, Mr. Neil Winther has been visiting our grade one class on a very casual basis. He has taught physical education at both the public school and university level in the past and is presently studying at the University of Alberta. Mr. Winther is gathering information for his M.Ed. thesis which is entitled "The Meaning of Physical Activity as Perceived by a Group of Grade One Students." The information gathered could possibly be used to develop a physical education curriculum for young children that takes into account the child's perception of his/her own world.

Mr. Winther wishes to spend several hours a week over a period of months as a participant-observer in our grade one class. His intention is to record the thoughts and feelings these children express relating to their own physical activities, both in the school setting and in extracurricular activities. He hopes to collect this information by:

-participation in classroom discussions
-descriptive note taking in the classroom and gym
- tape recording discussions with children, staff and parents
-video taping or photographing children engaged in physical activities to be used to stimulate discussion later.

Mrs. Susan and I have discussed this with Mr. Winther and feel it would be a worthwhile experience for the students, without interfering with their regular activities. As well, it would give us helpful information related to young children's perceptions of physical activity.

We look foreward to this being a beneficial learning experience for all of us. If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Susan or myself at____.

Thank you,

Principal.

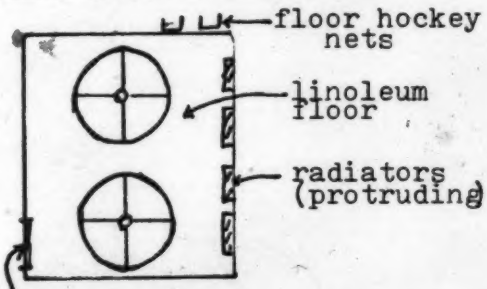
APPENDIX 5

JAY AND HER RABBIT SKATING

APPENDIX 6

EXAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES

Physical Education Lesson

Comments/Interpretations	Description
Wed. Dec. 1,1982 - 1:20	
- the room was cold	
- yellow walls made it look very drab.	
- very poor lighting and windows so small they let in little light.	
- ceiling very low - 15 ft.	
- clean floor but not a friendly environment - almost depressing.	
- about 40 x 60 ft.	Note: T. = Teacher Susan.
	The Lesson:
- Why have them sit? They have been conditioned to sit until given a command. Free?? - there were many restrictions.	- children arrive 1:22 and sit tell T. say "o.k. free movement" to warm up.
- Why wear shoes - can feel the floor better in bare feet	- "stop - check your shoe laces"
- Why not "show me what pathways....	- T.- "what pathways did you run yesterday?"
- students answered with good action words *use these in interviews??	Students: - wiggly, curvy
- what does "good" mean? open?	- T.- "find a good space on the floor."
- Chris obviously enjoys showing the other kids his movements - he stays close to Susan.	- T.- move to another spot and do wiggly pathways.
- Sue also appears outgoing.	- Chris show us your pathway.
	- Sue raises her hand to show her skipping movement.
- they make a special effort to move close to each other! Time: 1:26	- T. - "try not to collide"
	- kids try hopping on 1 foot.

- although the tasks seem to be exploratory in nature T. is using a command style of teaching.	- T. "another kind of moving" kids start walking.
- the kids don't look happy- there is not much laughter or smiling.	- T. - "Harry show us your gallop"
- the atmosphere is a work atmosphere - not like when we are running on the playground.	- T. -"Everyone get in your space and make a good line"- (with their bodies)
- there is no dialogue between the T. and the class.	- "Bob are you making a line?
- are these activities meaningful to the kids?	- T. -"Lee is straight on her side."
- would they not gain more from a game that incorporated these skills but was more fun to play?	- T."Run a straight line and and stop."
- many of the tasks are boring - maybe some music would make it more interesting and fill some of the empty spaces in this gym.	- T.- Don't run into someone else's space."
Time: 1:33	- T.- "change directions"
- I liked the dialoge but why only ask 2 students?	- T.- " 2 bangs on this drum mean stop."
- other kids had something to say.	- T.- "try going on a line and then stopping."
* make sure to give them all a chance to talk.	- T.- "try making sharp corners."
- I don't understand task.	- T.- "stop then turn, then go."
- the children didn't get very enthused about this this task.	_ T."everyone <u>sit down</u>"
- this stuff would be boring for adults to do - why do we think kids should enjoy it??	- T. - "how does your body feel when you turn?"
	- Bob - "I feel like I'm flying."
	- John- "Made me feel sick."
	-T. - "make a curvy pathway and see if your whole body feels soft."
	T. - "make a curvy pathway with your elbow"
	T.- "take your shoulder and move in curvy pathways."
	- T.- "make bigger pathways"
	_ T.- "make a bigger pathway and make your body move gently.

- obviously these kids had had enough of this kind of activity...maybe their actions should have been used as a warning that the lesson was too dry.

- I think Lee will have more earaches in the future if the lessons don't get more stimulating.

- where do we ever use this in sports application?

- o.k. they are really enjoying this - why not capitalize on it - use it as the springboard to another activity.

- why not finish with a game?

- the children realize they will never get out of the gym if they don't line up quickly and quietly.

Time: 1:47

- The kids did a lot of "things" in class however they did not appear to enjoy it very much - I think fun is critical in motivation.

(Lee, Alice & Jay go and sit by the wall)

-T. goes over and convinces Alice and Jay to come back into the group - Lee stays sitting.

- Lee comes and sits by me.

- I ask her "weren't you having fun out there?"

- Lee answers-"I have an earache."

- T. "make your body feel straight and stiff and tall."

- T. "walk in a straight line being tall."

- (the kids start marching - swinging their arms and seem to be enjoying this.)

- T. "No- walk straight but softly and quietly."

- (the kids stop marching)

- T.- "everyone come run around the circle."

- T. -"o.k. it's time to go everyone line up."

APPENDIX 7

TRANSCRIPTION OF CONVERSATION WITH RUDI AND COLIN

Neil: What did you do at recess today?

Rudi: I played dodge ball.

Colin: I was playing with Ben with his big cars.

Neil: How do you play dodge ball?

Rudi: Well do you know that big board?

Neil: Outside over there? (pointing)

Rudi: Three people are along it - or more - the one person throws it along the board and if they get hit they're it. If it (the ball) was going towards their head they might duck down.

Neil: Isn't it scary standing by the board?

Rudi: [Naw...]

Colin:]

Rudi: It's fun.

Neil: Is it more fun to be the person throwing or the person standing?

Colin: The person whose standing because you get to move around a lot.

Neil: What other games do you play at recess?

Rudi: Some days we used to play ball tag, but now we play soccer.

Neil: How do you play ball tag?

Rudi: Like someone has the ball and people try to hide so they don't get hit because if it hits them they have to be it. Only one person is it except if we

have two balls - one day we had two balls right John?

Neil: So how do you keep from being hit?

Rudi: We just duck down or go in the house (play house) or slide down the slide or swing on the bridge - like you have your arms here (he demonstrates) - and you go like this and jump.

Neil: Do you ever play spiderman or do you ever pretend you're superman?

Colin: No.

Rudi: I can because I have a spiderman toque - and I have a batman toque.

Neil: So do you ever pretend you are superman? When you climb up in a tree do you ever pretend you are Tarzan?

Colin: Yea, I sometimes do that. I jump off the couch when I'm Tarzan.

Neil: Do you ever play Tarzan in gym class?

Rudi: Umm - no we play basketball.

Neil: What else?

Colin: And we play floor hockey.

Rudi: Like uh, me and Fred go together and swing and get the rope and make bridges.

Neil: Do you like going to gym class?

Rudi: Yes.

Neil: Why is gym class different from being in the classroom?

Rudi: It isn't any different, it's the same.

Neil: What do you play at home with your friends?

Rudi: I can't play with my brother, he always beats me up.

Neil: Is he bigger or smaller than you?

Rudi: Smaller than me.

Neil: And he beats you up?

Rudi: Yep.

Neil: So you can't play games with him?

Rudi: Not any more because he has the measles.

Neil: How about you Colin, what do you play at home with your friends?

Colin: I play...I play...games with them.

Neil: What kinds of games?

Colin: Like...rocket hockey.

Neil: Rocket hockey...how do you play rocket hockey?

Colin: Well see there's two goalies with a really fast puck. And you wind it p and push a button and it goes out (the puck) and there's two goals at the sides and you try and not let the puck go in the goals.

Neil: When you are playing do you sometimes play in a game where there is a winner and a loser?

Colin: Yea, sometimes we play baseball.

Neil: When you are playing do you like to be the winner or the loser?

Colin:
Rudi: Winner.

Neil: When you are playing do you think boys are better than girls in sports?

Rudi: (laughing) yes.

Colin: I think boys are better. Like when we let girls play ball tag they always miss us because we trick them.

Neil: How do you trick them?

Rudi: Like when they're coming to the side we are on we just go (demonstrated a quick sideways movement) and then run behind the house. (play house).

Neil: I bet they're surprised.

Colin: Yea. When we play hockey with the girls - we might win because we can go like this (dodges) and we can go back and foreward like this. (quick sideways movements) and we might get it in the goal.

Neil: Where did you learn to do those things?

Colin: At school, cause we play all the time and us boys move like this.

Neil: So the girls don't know how to do those tricks?

Rudi: No. They don't know how to do them.

Neil: Why don't they know how to do them?

Rudi: Well, because they haven't really learned... I've got to think about it. Well maybe they were born after us, and they aren't as old as us - so we know more.

Colin: We are a little bit faster than the girls.

Rudi: Colin is faster than me.

Neil: Why are you so fast?

Colin: Because I eat a lot. Yesterday I ate apples and toast with cheeze wiz on top of it,and when it was recess I was running and a girl was running and I was running faster than her.

Neil: Why were you faster?

Colin: Because I ate a lot and I used long steps.

Neil: How about when you go out for recess time - do you walk out or run out?

Rudi: Walk out - but when we go back in we run.

Neil: Why?

Rudi: Because we don't want to be the last ones in. If you are late for school you have to tell the principal and the reason is because you don't have to hurry when you go out but when the bell rings you have to be in a hurry.

APPENDIX 8

PERSONAL DIARY

October 28, 1982 - Thursday

- spoke to Max today.
- said to watch movements, talk, face, arms, as children express themselves. (how can I watch everything at once and get down what they are saying too?)
- said things that are high ask you "beckon" you to jump?
- talked about sitting still as opposed to movement and the different ways of sitting still. (can this be used?) How do I get at it?
- Max not keen on use of VTR.
- are these movements different for adults and children?

November 22, 1982 - Monday

-the kids wore name tags hung around their necks to help me get their names straight (kind of like necklaces) Susan said it was their idea.
- I have to decide on some basic vocabulary to use with them. Are we talking about different things when I refer to play/games/sport? Physical activity is a big word - not a grade one word. Do they interpret my questions?
-I tried small group discussion today and it bombed - it was too structured and the kids seemed to parrot each other's answers in an effort to give me the "right" answer.

November 30, 1982 - Tuesday

- I'm having trouble being "objective" with my subjective assessment of what these kids are saying.I seem to be slipping between the humanistic and critical paradigms - (did Apple have anything to do with this??) When a kid tells me he likes to go deep sea fishing I think "this kid didn't grow up in the same world I did". Then I become

critical of the values this kid has grown up with. All this gets me terribly far away from the task at hand. I am interpreting before I have described and maybe just showing some of my biases - social inequality being unjust. None the less this kid is six and he already knows how to flaunt it!

December 4, 1982 - Saturday

- Are these kids really giving me the straight goods? Are they "handing me a line" like Max has said? I have to be sure to keep an ongoing knowledge of what Susan is teaching so I can determine if what they tell me isn't just what they are learning to accept at school. They may only be telling me what Susan has told them in the past.
- I will ask them "Is your Dad/Mom fit? Do they have the cultural methods to describe these things?
- Cut out of comic books; things that make a statement about fitness/play/sports etc. to use as a stimulus for discussion.
- how do I get to view things in their true relationship or relative importance?

December 6, 1982 - Monday

- compare kids perceptions with adult perceptions of the same concept.
- verification of the interpretations of children's meanings.
- context of learning environment - should I be taping while teaching, moving - is this possible?
- validity - control of variables - is this problem?
- the use of stories about sports - is this not skirting the issues? isn't this a divergent technique - I haven't got five years to finish this study!
- it's hard to observe them while I'm teaching them ie. I'm trying to think of what to tell them next; evaluate what

they just did and give them feedback; make my own field notes - it's too much.
- should I talk to parents too - would this "fill out" the study or complicate it beyond reason? - first thought - no! -ask Larry.
- should I ask questions to another group of kids?

December 7, 1982 - Tuesday

- talked to Dr. Aoki - he raised some question regarding the use of VTR (I haven't used it yet) and the nature of the experience when children are watching. I don't think it will be necessary in the study because dialogue seems to be working well.
- Also spoke about catching a correct view - versus catching the truth. I think I'll leave this one for the Ph.D.
-should be recording more of what the kids are teaching me.
- What are the kids asking me?

January 11, 1983 - Tuesday

- should I send a survey home to the parents - kind of a profile of the children - short story about your child's interest in sports?
- personal account of their own background?
- I think I should be able to get this from the kids.

February 11, 1983 - Friday

- Maybe we should have grades 1 - 3 together so the kids aren't slotted into having to complete specific skills in each grade - they could flow from one level to another.
- The games the kids play seem to give them some control or power in a world where they are otherwise powerless.
- Maybe the kids should have more time to teach/help each other - the present structure doesn't allow this.

March 19, 1983 - Saturday

- It may be helpful if I tell the kids to lay down and close

their eyes as they try to recollect.
- Should I have adults recollect childhood experiences?

April 19, 1983 - Tuesday

- Felix said "that bench doesn't like me" - what does this mean about his perceptions?
- What are all those line ups for - preparation for going to the movies?
- The kids like to tell me about party(B.day), bikes, getting hurt, new clothes etc.
- they like to show me how they do "hard tricks".
- these kids have a great sense of humor.

May 22, 1983 - Sunday

- The children have very real feelings, opinions, reactions to what is going on around them.
- The are given little opportunity to argue with decisions affecting them.
- As adults we feel we are experts in our lives and in the child's life.
- Lessons should be structured to guarantee success.

May 25, 1983 - Wednesday

- The kids need more excitement in their lessons.
- Boredom is the worst thing for kids - they can pick out a poor lesson easily.
- I don't think there is enough love in the school setting. What's wrong with giving a kid a hug once in a while - some of them need it (Jay).
- I asked the kids what they would like as a new name if they could change their present names - this is what I will call them in the study.
- Anger - expression vs. repression .

May 26, 1983 - Thursday

- I had a great chat with Felix and Leana - lots of"good

stuff" about climbing trees and summer sports but that stupid tape recorder wasn't working - I missed more than half of it!
- I have identified ten themes that seem to keep reoccuring in the conversations.
- I watched some rocket launches with the kids today.

May 27, 1983 - Friday

- I walked through the playground with four different kids today Sue,Alice,Chris, John - the girls were great except we spent a lot of time talking about a helicopter and airplane that flew over. The boys were brats today. They started fighting , throwing grass over each other and me. I think they are getting a little tired of being interviewed. We played on the equipment instead.

May 31, 1983 - Tuesday

- Teacher Susan may not be the "world's best P.Ed. teacher" but she sure does a fantastic job of everything else. I hope my girl is lucky enough to have a teacher like her. How much consideration is given to "caring qualities" when teachers are hired? Does anyone know how to determine this?
- Maybe we can't make all experiences fun.

June 2, 1983 - Thursday

- How much does our perspective change by being parents/athletes/coaches etc. - how does this influence interpretation?
- Can you come close to "putting yourself inside the child's perspective" without knowing what the skill feels like yourself - ie. could a quadriplegic describe movement?
- I think it is important to have a personal reason for uncovering meaning in a specific phenomenon - you try harder.

June 14, 1983 - Tuesday

- Suransky and Beekman - fantastic - looked at my data and saved me hundreds of hours. They liked what I was doing - I'm very pleased with their support.
- Sorry to have to leave the school - it's been a good time and the kids taught me a lot. They have a better outlook on life than we do.

July 15, 1983 - Friday

- This lady told me today that she was a great child athlete but she "felt bad" beating all the other kids in races all the time - so she would let them win. I should have asked my kids that question - guilt?

August 22, 1983 - Monday

- Even though some negative comments came out of the study I'm happy I did a study about nice kids living through what appeared to be a good time of their lives. Their enthusiasm kept me going. I think it would have been difficult to spend this much time studying "nasty" or depressing things.
- I think it was important that I studied a group that wanted to be studied.
- My reflections occured in parallel focusing and struggling on method and topic at the same time. The method was not prefabricated-it evolved with the study - life is constantly evolving.

September 17, 1983 - Saturday

- Since I was the "instrument" maybe more time should have been spent examining why I think/perceive the way I do.
- The "techniques used were based on lived in addition to learned experiences.
- The key thing is to make children feel good about themselves. I think it is difficult for highly skilled athletes to relate to poorly skilled children.
- Competition is a "cop-out" on the part of the teacher

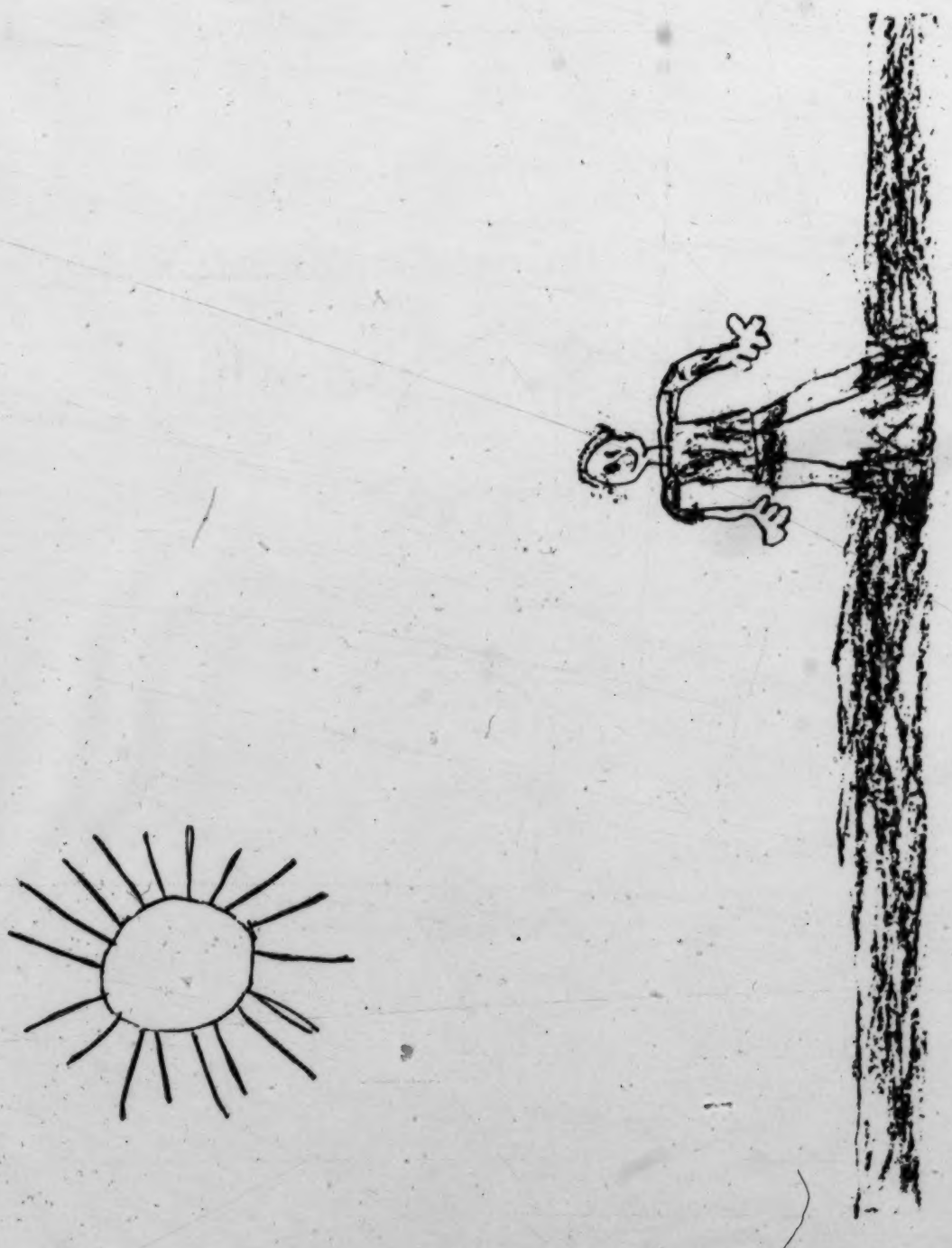
who uses winning as a motivational tool.
-Children are expected to perform for adults. I think it starts when adults "poke" babies to make them laugh for them. Try having someone poke you in the face and see if it's funny!
- The notion of "enriched environments/experiences" bothers me in that in most other circumstances when something is enriched (bread) they take out a lot and add back a little. Is this what happens in high profile children's sports?
- I think a descriptive study could be enhanced with the addition of poetry, art, music etc. that help make sense of a certain phenomenon - it seems words are limiting. (a picture is worth a thousand words etc.)
- I had some trouble deciding what to call the method/approach/technique used in this study. It did not matter to me that I borrowed from phenomenology, ethnography, situational interpretive and other descriptive approaches collectively looked at as qualitative research. What mattered was that I remained faithful to my kids in describing the world the way they saw it. If I remained within the guidelines of one approach this study might not have given me the answers it did. I relied heavily on common sense.
- I think developmental psychologists should examine children instead of rats if they want to understand why adults act the way they do. They should also make their observations in the real world instead of the laboratory.

APPENDIX 9

RUDI'S SPACESHIP IN THE SOCCER FIELD

APPENDIX 10

FRED JOGGING IN THE SUN



APPENDIX 11

WAR GAMES FOR CHILDREN

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL, Saturday, July 16, 1983

Taking aim

Heather Cooper, 5, of Kingston, Ont., takes aim with a toy gun Friday at the kiddie assault course in a park in Kingston. The course, set up by the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery Regiment from CFB Petawawa, featured mini-obstacles and firing a real machine-gun.

APPENDIX 12

AWARENESS OF DETAIL

Sue dancing

Chris skating

APPENDIX 13

OTHER RESEARCH DESIGNS

These kids really swing

Eighteen budding gymnasts are swinging, rolling, tumbling and twirling in a new University of Manitoba program before most of them are old enough to say "gymnastics".

Neil Winther, supervisor of the [illegible] program said although not a research program, it's the first program of its kind at the university.

He said parents of the children were prepared to have their children monitored during the weekly 45-minute sessions.

He described it as "the ultimate movement experience for a two-year-old."

Twelve instructors are on hand each Saturday to teach the toddlers gymnastic skills.

Winther says each session is videotaped to watch the children's progress and evaluate teaching methods. He hopes to monitor the same children over a five-year period.

"At age seven, we can identify kids of different athletic ability," Winther said. He plans to bring in a group of three-year-olds who haven't been through the program to compare movement skills and social interaction in two groups.

Above, Michael Lee is happy to be on the ground again. Left: Karen gets an upside down look at the world while (below left) Adnan Lepsic is wrapped up in the rings. Below: Katya Pequin tries tumbling.